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# HAWAIIAN EYE



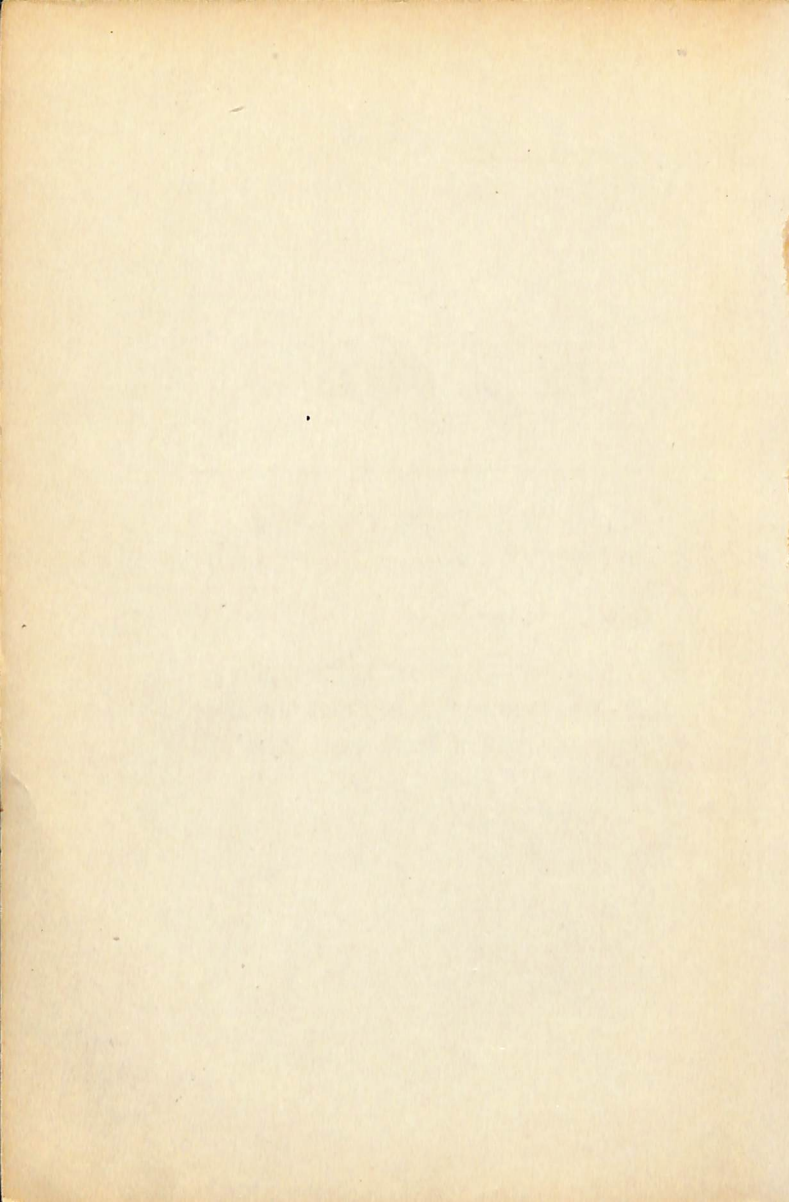
by FRANK CASTLE

The big M's—  
money and murder  
in a tense, seething  
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# THE DESTIN ESTATE

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strange cause of death, even though  
they were separated by time and by  
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Based on the Warner Bros.  
top-rated TV series

# HAWAIIAN EYE

starring

Anthony Eisley	Robert Conrad
Connie Stevens	Grant Williams
Poncie Ponce	

Frank Castle

# HAWAIIAN EYE

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**A Dell First Edition**    an original novel



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# HAWAIIAN EYE





# One

The dark-haired young woman faced Tracy Steele across the desk in the Hawaiian Eye reception room. Her clothing, her manner, everything about her, spoke eloquently of wealth and superlative beauty.

Tracy stared at her. He could not help it.

"I would like you to find someone for me, my—my secretary," the woman said. Her voice had a light, faintly breathless quality. It seemed to trail caressing fingertips across Tracy's cheek.

Tom Lopaka, holding a suitcase, was staring also. Tom had come into the reception room, through the street door, just after her.

Tracy said, "We'll be glad to help if we can, Miss—"

"Destin," the vision murmured. "Yolanda Destin."

Tracy blinked at the mention of that name. And Tom Lopaka exclaimed, "Good Lord!"

She started, glancing toward him. Somewhat darker color showed in Tom's tanned, handsome features. He added hastily, "Miss Destin, I saw you several times, years ago at the big house your grandfather built, out Nuuanu way. I used to play around there as a kid, outside of the grounds. I remember seeing you ride up and down the long drive in your pony cart."

"Yes," Yolanda Destin said. "The pony's name was Buttons. There was a groom named Manolo. My nurse's name was Milliama."

"It has been a long time since there was a Destin in Honolulu," Tom said. "I hope you're back to stay."



Cricket Blake, standing beside Tracy, sniffed explosively.

Tracy started. He had forgotten she was there, an unusual oversight for it was difficult to lose track of Cricket at any time. Belatedly remembering his manners, Tracy said, "Miss Destin, may I introduce my partner in Hawaiian Eye, Tom Lopaka. I am Tracy Steele. And this is Miss Blake."

The door was open from the reception room to the inner office, which contained desks for Tracy Steele, for Tom Lopaka and for Greg MacKenzie, the firm's third partner. It was a lanai office, open on the far side, with a warm afternoon flood of Hawaiian sunlight pouring in. Tracy wondered momentarily again why the door was open, why the reception room had been empty when he and Cricket had entered, moments ago.

Cricket said, "Miss Destin and I have already met."

Delicate dark brows arched as the other woman said, "Indeed? I am afraid that I don't remember."

"Last night," Cricket amplified. "At the Shell Bar."

"Oh. Yes. You're the girl who sings," Yolanda Destin said. She then glanced away, looking also through the open door, toward the patio beyond the office and the emerald shimmer of a small swimming pool that was centered in the patio itself.

Off to the right of the swimming pool there was a wall, with another door. That door opened onto the lobby of the Hawaiian Village Hotel, one of the plush resorts of Waikiki Beach and Hawaiian Eye's number-one client.

Cricket said, "That's right. I'm the girl who sings."

There seemed to be a slight edge in her voice. Tracy interrupted, "Er—Cricket, do you mind? I'll see you a little later."

Cricket hesitated, seemed about to say something, then let it go. "All right," she agreed. "I'll wait for you on the beach."

She had been at Tracy all morning and into the afternoon to go surfing with her. He had not said yes but was resigned, not unhappily, to the fact that he probably would.

Cricket moved around the receptionist's desk. Her blond hair was upswept and pinned high. She wore a white beach

coat over a red bathing suit and carried a coolie hat. Cricket was not beautiful, as was the dark-haired, lustrous-eyed other woman, but she was very pretty—which Cricket at times regarded as her cross to bear.

Passing behind Tom Lopaka, who was still engrossed in staring at Yolanda Destin, Cricket gouged an elbow into his back.

"And a warm hello to you, too!" she said in payment for the fact that Tom, after several days' absence, had not spoken to her at all. Then she went on out, through the entrance door to the street.

Yolanda Destin said, "May I sit down, please?"

Tom leaped with alacrity to assist her to a chair facing the desk. Tracy pulled out a chair and sat down also, reaching for a pad and pen, wondering still about that open door and the emptiness of this room, the absence of the receptionist who should be here.

"Hawaiian Eye is primarily a security service used by various businesses throughout the islands," he explained, "though at times we handle private cases. Has your secretary disappeared? If so, it would properly be a matter for the police. We would be glad to notify them for you."

"No. Thank you, but I don't think she has disappeared."

He was aware of a tantalizing scent with a sandalwood base. Her mouth was painted a rather dark red. Her lower lip was full and there was a slight cleft in her chin.

Dark eyes studying several brilliant color prints of the islands recently hung on the reception room walls. Yolanda Destin continued, "She left my employ five days ago just after we arrived here by air from Hong Kong. There was a—a disagreement between us. I regret that now and wish to talk to her. I am sure she is still in Honolulu. If you can find her and arrange a meeting, I will be very grateful."

"I see," Tracy said. "And what is her name?"

"Mae Gamble," the woman said.

Tracy's hand jerked. The pen he held skidded across the desk.

Tom Lopaka had started. A puzzled frown wrinkled his brow. He looked to Tracy questioningly. Tracy shook his

head slightly, a warning for Tom to stay quiet.

Yolanda Destin continued, "Mae is about my height and size; she could wear my clothes. She has brown hair and brown eyes and she is pretty—in a somewhat bold fashion."

Tracy doodled. "We'll do all we can, Miss Destin."

"Thank you. I am staying at the—the big house." She sent a momentary glance toward Tom Lopaka. "The phone is connected, but please don't try to call me. I will get in touch with you personally later."

Tracy rose to his feet again, for she was standing, starting toward the street door. Tom stepped aside, still wearing his puzzled look.

At the door she turned with a smile, distributed it between them—there was a quality of strain in it, Tracy thought—then walked out into the brilliant afternoon sunshine.

A long moment later, Tom murmured, "What a gorgeous doll!"

Tracy nodded, in complete agreement.

Beautiful women were commonplace in Honolulu. The one who had just left rated with the loveliest he had ever seen.

Tom shook himself. "Now for the big question, partner," he said. "Where in blazes is Mae Gamble?"

"Partner, I don't know," Tracy replied. "Just before the arrival of Miss Destin, who appeared only a moment before you—"

"I missed seeing her first by only that much?" Tom interrupted. "Blalah, you do have all the luck!"

"Just before," Tracy said, "I came in with Cricket to discover the place deserted, the phones ringing their heads off, and our Miss Gamble, whom you hired three days ago, missing."

"Whom you helped me in hiring," Tom reminded him. "Incidentally, would you term Mae pretty in a somewhat bold fashion?"

"I would term Mae liable to be suddenly fired for walking away from her job like that," Tracy replied. He glanced about the reception room and through the open door to

the office and patio, frowning. He added, "This is about the oddest caper ever. We've been asked to find our own receptionist!"

"Well, she'll probably reappear presently," Tom remarked. "And if she doesn't there's an address for her on file, a hotel on or near Ilaniwai Street. It shouldn't be difficult to get in touch with Miss Gamble."

Tracy lighted a cigarette. "I wonder—? Could there be a connection between her sudden absence and her former employer's arrival to ask us to find her?"

"You may have a point," Tom conceded thoughtfully. "Tracy, have you ever heard how much money is supposed to be in the Destin estate? It just might be significant."

"I've heard guesses of ten million and on up," Tracy added a doodle to his pad. "It seems indicated that we locate Miss Gamble. Of course, she just might walk back in at any moment, but in case she doesn't how about you doing a bit of checking, Kamaki, starting with her hotel?"

"Okay," Tom agreed. "If, that is, I also can make the report to Miss Destin when I find Mae."

"Oh, no!" Tracy chuckled. "Remember, I saw her first!"

"Yeah." Tom sighed and picked up his suitcase. "I'll put this away and get to work," he said.

"Incidentally, you didn't spend much time on Maui," Tracy said.

"It was a matter of misunderstanding on the part of the Jolo people concerning the terms of our contract with them," Tom replied. "Everything is straightened out now, I hope. They flew me back in the company plane."

He moved across the reception room to the office door, then paused there for a moment. "Our Cricket seemed to be edgy about something," Tom observed.

Tracy smiled. "Isn't she always, when another woman, an attractive one, is claiming our attention? Cricket wants me to go surfing with her. Don't see how I can, though; somebody has to hold down this desk until Moke shows up—or Mae returns."

Tom passed on into the lanai office. Greg MacKenzie, the third partner, was absent at the moment in San Francisco. Tom was heading toward his apartment—which,

like the one occupied by Tracy Steele, was beyond the patio pool, Tracy's downstairs, Tom's above it.

Tracy eased himself into a relaxed position at the reception desk. About the same height as Tom Lopaka but leaner than Tom, who was all supple, flowing muscle, Tracy's assets were wiry strength and driving energy, with a good dose of puckish humor.

Tom, a dogged, never-give-up sort, was somewhat more sober and intense in his approach to life. They complemented each other very well. Greg MacKenzie, brought into the firm to cope with the rising tide of business, was a wisecracking extrovert who nevertheless could also be a bulldog when tackling a problem.

Tracy adjusted the jacket of his rough-weave gray linen suit, touched a thoughtful forefinger to his thin, rakish mustache and thought of Mae Gamble, seeking a reason for her sudden disappearance, thought also of a faint, elusive scent of blackmail that might have accompanied Yolanda Destin here.

Tom suddenly shouted from the patio, "Tracy!"

He was up and running instantly at the sound of that call, echoing like a pistol shot.

Tom was beside the pool, kneeling on the tile coping, reaching to something that bobbed in the water close to his hand. Tracy saw it instantly, a huddle of sodden clothing, someone in those clothes, face down, and for a chilling second he thought they had found Mae Gamble. Then he realized that it was a man.

Tracy gripped Tom's free hand. Tom leaned far out, clutched a fold of jacket, and pulled. Together they lifted the man out, settled him face down, head turned, hurriedly arranging his arms and legs. Tom touched his wrist. "Just a flicker of pulse," he reported.

Quick facts beat at Tracy, someone about his own age, thirtyish, black hair sheared to a quarter-inch brush, a powder-blue gabardine suit. He straddled the body, kneeling, setting his hands, squeezing, relaxing, squeezing, beginning artificial respiration.

Tom ran into the lanai office and scooped up a phone. His voice crackled, "Police? Emergency! Rescue truck to

Hawaiian Eye office, wikiwiki! Tell them to have their pulmotor ready to go!"

He came back, knelt beside the limp figure and said, "You want me to spell you?"

Tracy grunted affirmatively. Tom moved in beside him, put his hands forward, set them and took up the rhythm without missing a beat as Tracy scrambled forward and clear.

On one knee then, he turned and ran his fingers lightly over the man's skull. "Slugged," Tracy reported. "I thought so, from the way the skin is turning dark under his eyes. Right here." His fingers paused at the base of the skull. "A mushy feel."

Then he had a look at the man's face, started, and leaned closer for a more detailed scrutiny. "Tom, I know this guy!"

Tracy snapped his fingers, squeezing his memory. "His name is Burke. No, Burrell, Jack Burrell. He's Navy, an Annapolis man, a lieutenant when I met him. That was a couple of years ago, on the Baranof case. He flew out from Washington as an observer from O.N.I., since the Navy had an interest in the case."

Tom's lips rounded in a startled whistle. An officer of Naval Intelligence, head cracked and dumped in their pool—when had it happened? Why? What did it mean?

Why had Mae Gamble disappeared?

Lieutenant Danny Quon of the Honolulu Police Department sat at Tracy's desk in the lanai office. A swarthy, handsome man of razor-sharp ability, he was examining a koa-wood war club, memento of Hawaii's tumultuous past, usually resting on an ornamental rack in the patio but found beside the pool and tentatively tabbed as the assault weapon.

He said, "So it isn't a case for homicide, thanks to you and Tom, Tracy. Mahalo nui! I've more than enough to keep me jumping without having the murder of an O.N.I. officer dumped in my lap!"

Activity still continued in the patio, now crowded with people. Tracy had called Naval Headquarters at Pearl Har-

bor, which had brought a string of cars hurtling to the Hawaiian Village Hotel. Navy doctors had taken over. The police emergency squad was assembling its gear, preparing to leave. Tom had admitted that squad through the patio door, where he had found the latch stuck. It was working now.

Quon continued, "You say he was floating on something—?"

Tracy, pacing back and forth, smoking, thinking hard, nodded absently. "Yes. A small inflated rubber mat that Cricket put in the pool yesterday; maybe he managed to scramble onto it before passing out."

"It probably saved him from taking in any more water, kept him from drowning," Quon commented.

Perhaps. The essential thing was that Jack Burrell was not dead. Thanks to Tracy and Tom's fast action, a weak spark of life still glowed in him.

Tom came in from the patio, accompanied by a compact, ruddy-faced, white-haired man. When he wore a Naval uniform it had four fat gold stripes on each sleeve. He was Captain Elias Ziffren, District Intelligence Officer—D.I.O.—of the Fourteenth Naval District, with headquarters at Pearl Harbor.

Ziffren had made several phone calls since arriving, and the information he had received obviously had upset him. He held the material which Tracy had removed from Burrell's person, a small leather folder with his Naval Intelligence identification card, his badge, his wallet, and an envelope with a ticket stub indicating Burrell had arrived in Honolulu on United Air Line's flight 33, scheduled in from Los Angeles at 11:15 that morning.

Captain Ziffren said, his voice a strained growl, "How much of this can be kept quiet?"

Danny Quon gave him an answer. "I'll do my best to see it is played down, Captain. The moment I arrived and Tracy said Naval Intelligence to me, I ordered that the reporters and photographers were to be kept out. I'll issue a statement speaking broadly of simple assault, and try to keep it in that status."

"Thanks for your help," the D.I.O. said heavily.

He turned attention then to Tracy. "Steele, you say that you don't know a thing about this, how Burrell happened to be here and why he was assaulted in your place?"

"No, sir, I do not," Tracy replied.

He felt that some factor had been overlooked by himself and Tom Lopaka.

Danny Quon said, "Just to keep the record straight, Captain, is it correct to assume that Burrell is not an officer attached to your staff, that he has no duty status at present here in Honolulu?"

Ziffren frowned at Tracy, rightly guessing that he, familiar as he was with the Naval Intelligence setup at Pearl Harbor, had suggested this possibility to Quon. "That is correct," Ziffren answered shortly.

"Okay," Quon said. "Now I would like you to hear what Tracy has already told me."

Tracy said, "Tom Lopaka has been over on Maui the past two days, looking into a matter involving one of our clients, the Jolo Land Development Company. I have been holding down the office. Greg MacKenzie, our other partner, is in San Francisco. I stopped in here about ten this morning to check the mail. Our receptionist, Miss Mae Gamble, was on duty then—"

Ziffren interrupted, with a harsh rising inflection. "Then—?"

"I had lunch on the hotel terrace with a prospective client," Tracy continued. "At two, I came here again. Miss Gamble was not present. I was busy at the receptionist's desk for several moments, answering telephones. Tom came in, back from Maui. He started across the patio toward his apartment and saw Burrell in the pool."

Ziffren breathed hard. "Your receptionist has not returned?"

Tracy shook his head. And the D.I.O. said, "Then it was that woman—!"

"Maybel!" Quon said, heavily emphasizing the word. "An All Points is out for her. She will soon be picked up and intensively questioned, Captain."



"Yes," Ziffren agreed. "And I know we'll have your full co-operation, as always." He glanced toward Tom Lopaka and Tracy Steele. "Yours, also."

Stretcher-bearers began to move through the office. Ziffren glanced to the still figure which they carried.

"Our doctors report a basal skull fracture, depressed," he muttered. "You'll be kept informed of his condition, Lieutenant."

He followed the stretcher-bearers out. The patio was emptying now, some of those there coming through the office, some departing by way of the hotel lobby. Two Hawaiian Eye guards, assigned to day duty in the hotel, were keeping curious onlookers back from that door.

Tom and Tracy were left alone with Danny Quon, who said after a moment, "The air ticket says Burrell arrived at 11:15 or thereabouts. Five will get you ten that he came straight here from the airport, that he was in a tearing hurry to see you, Tracy."

"I made a guess to that effect as soon as I saw the ticket," Tracy responded. "But I can't begin to guess why he did it. I was only slightly acquainted with Burrell when he was here two years ago and I haven't had any contact at all with him since."

"Maybe it had to do with the Baranof case you mentioned?" Quon suggested. "Espionage, wasn't it?"

"Yes. But that was an F.B.I. case, Burrell was involved in it only as an onlooker, observing for the Navy. Anyway, the case has long been closed. He must have had another reason for coming here now."

"When he walked in and perhaps saw Miss Gamble," Quon said.

"Maybe not," Tom said. "Perhaps she was already gone."

"If so, she picked a damned poor time to drop out of sight!" Quon said. "I'm a little skeptical about the possibility that he wound up in the pool with his head cracked, and that she disappeared without knowing about it."

He hefted the koa-wood club thoughtfully. "Did she low-bridge him with this? It isn't a heavy weapon, though

there's no doubt it could crack a skull. So she could have done it. But if so, why?"

"Well, even if Mae proves elusive, Burrell isn't dead," Tom pointed out. "He ought to be able to give some answers before long."

Quon snorted. "And they will probably be classified as top secret, particularly the reason for him being in Honolulu, on the basis that his orders can't be revealed."

Tracy, pacing again, abruptly stopped. He said, "What orders?"

They studied him blankly for a moment. Then Quon slapped his forehead ruefully, and Tom said, "He didn't have any on him!"

"Right," Tracy said. "He had his credentials, his wallet, with three hundred dollars in it, but no orders. Would anyone take them from him? Why? He would have had general orders, merely directing him to proceed here. He came from the mainland, passing from one naval district to another. He couldn't do that, unless he was AWOL, without a set of orders—not an officer assigned to O.N.I.—even if he was only on leave with permission to travel. But he had no orders! Ziffren spotted that instantly, made a couple of quick phone calls and got the answers. No orders were issued to Burrell allowing him to come to the islands. He is absent without leave from his duty station. It is the reason why Ziffren was carrying such a head of steam. It has to be the reason!"

"I think you're right," Quon said. "Burrell is going to wake up with a splitting headache and find himself under arrest."

Tom rounded it out. "And a court martial facing him."

"Why did he do it?" Tracy said. "Why did he take such a chance, risking his career, rushing here from the mainland—?"

Unless all three of them were wrong, which Tracy discounted, this was exactly what Burrell had done. He was absent without leave from his duty post, located somewhere on the mainland. This was serious enough for any officer, even more serious for one who was assigned to Naval Intelligence.

"It seems like one answer," Quon decided. "Now let's try for another. Tracy, you left a small item out of your report to Captain Ziffren about what happened today, the item concerning a woman who came in after Tom and who left just before he discovered Burrell in the pool. Who was she and what did she want?"

## Two

Before Tracy could think of a reply, Kim Quisado came in from the street.

Kim was young, about twenty, short of stature, debonair and a true product of the islands; his immediate ancestors had been Filipino, Chinese-Hawaiian, Japanese and Korean. He spoke half a dozen languages, including his own brand of English.

Customarily attired in slacks and a garish aloha shirt, topped by a low-crowned hat with a flat top, he owned and drove a taxi which he called Kim's Kab, knew every nook and cranny of Honolulu and scurried constantly about the city like a hyperactive flea.

Like Cricket Blake, he regarded himself as a member of the Hawaiian Eye staff, and at the moment was in an aggrieved mood.

"What go on around here?" he demanded. "People shove, people push, some come in but when I try to I get a straight-arm, get kept out until just now. Why? Huh?"

Lieutenant Quon turned a cold eye on him. "Be quiet, or I'll give you a ticket," he said.

"Ticket? For what?" Kim cried. "I not do anything!"

"You will. You always do," Quon said. "Well, Tracy? How about it?"

"Danny, your undercover organization is, as usual, functioning perfectly," Tracy said. "I don't see how you do it."

"I do it like every other policeman," Quon said, "through informers. A woman comes along, beautiful enough to turn every head in sight, and walks in your door. Do you

think somebody wouldn't notice that and tip me off?"

"Not unless you were interested in her for some other reason."

Quon ignored this bait. And Tracy went on, "She is in the status of a client. Whatever was said on the occasion of her visit is privileged information."

"Would you care to test that statement in court?" Quon asked gently.

Tom stirred somewhat uneasily. Tracy considered, and shook his head. "I don't think so. The lady's name is Miss Yolanda Destin."

He paused. Quon, who at times could assume the placid, unrevealing facial expression of a Buddha, did so now.

"She wanted us to find the Mae Gamble we have been talking about, who was formerly her secretary," Tracy continued.

"Formerly?" Quon asked.

"Until five days ago, when she says Miss Gamble quit. And to anticipate your next question, Miss Gamble became our receptionist three days ago, sent to us by the hotel secretarial pool, which supplies all of our office girls."

"Did you perhaps tell your client that?" Quon asked.

"No. It seemed advisable to withhold the information until we found out where Miss Gamble went, and why."

Quon considered. Then he pushed back his chair and stood up. "I'll be running along. If you should happen to hear from Miss Gamble, or anything about her, let me know quick."

He walked out, taking the koa-wood club with him.

Tom and Tracy studied each other.

"No reaction when I revealed a Destin was back in Honolulu again—so he already knew about that," Tracy commented.

"And he didn't deny it when you guessed that he was already interested in her for some other reason," Tom pointed out. "So he is. What could that reason be, I wonder?"

Kim announced, "I know something."

"By this time Miss Gamble's hotel has probably been checked," Tom went on. "Probably nothing was found

there, especially Mae, or I think Danny would have mentioned it. However, cops have been known to overlook things at times."

"Yes," Tracy agreed. "We'll make our own check, just in case."

"I know something!" Kim repeated loudly. "Don't nobody want to hear what it is?"

"Certainly, sport," Tracy said. "Just what do you know?"

"Lady not come see you once," Kim said. "She come two times."

"Lady—?" Tom said.

"Mis' Destin," Kim stated. "First time, maybe one o'clock. She come out of lobby, walk to your door, step inside. Minute or two later, come out again quick and go toward beach."

"Kim, are you sure about that?" Tracy demanded.

"Sure, I sure! I just come from airport, sit in cab, wait for fare. I know her. Everybody know about it when she return to islands. Some people say it's good thing, a Destin here again. Some say no, she kaumaha, 'fraid of something, bad pilikia, same thing maybe that make her and her mama go 'way, years ago."

Tom smiled crookedly. "So everybody knew about it!" he said.

Tracy smiled also. By "everybody" Kim meant the Hawaiians of the island. The merriest, warmest-hearted, most generous people in the world, they could be as voluble as magpies on occasion, as close-mouthed as Chinese on others.

They had noted the return of Yolanda Destin, had discussed it but only among themselves. Their talk, which Kim had heard, might mean something—or nothing.

"Did you hear what she's afraid of, Kim?" Tracy asked. Kim shook his head.

"Find out, if you can," Tracy said.

Kim grinned. "Sure, Mr. Steele!"

Tracy tried a long shot then. "You said you were at the airport. You didn't happen to bring back a single passenger, a man—?"

"No," Kim said. "I bring back two ladies. Tourists."

Tracy described Jack Burrell minutely. "Did you see that man at the airport—or did you see him here?"

Kim thought hard. He shook his head again. "Lots of people come in today. I don't see him anywhere. Don't wait long out front after see Mis' Destin first time, but take a fare to Ala Wai Golf Club. Come back, see her come in here again, then Mr. Lopaka, and get another fare." He grinned eagerly. "You want me find that man you describe, Mr. Steele?"

"No," Tracy sighed. "We know where he is."

"We've overlooked something—Burrell's luggage," Tom said. "He must have had some. What happened to it?"

"Quon probably didn't overlook it," Tracy said. "Still, we had better check on that also, and find the taxi he took to get here."

Tom went on, "Kim, have you seen Miss Gamble today?"

"Maybe eleven o'clock, I come in and see her," Kim replied. "I want to talk. She don't. Act like something on her mind."

A phone rang at the receptionist's desk. Tom went to answer it. Tracy frowned, pacing again. Kim asked hopefully, "You want to ask me anything more?"

"No, but stick around," Tracy said. "We may need you."

Tom came back into the office. "Tracy, that call was from the Jolo people. They've thought of several more things to be dissatisfied about and want some answers right away. I'll have to check their contract and call them back."

Tracy glanced at his watch. Time had moved along. It had been quite a while now since Jack Burrell had been discovered in their pool, even longer since Mae Gamble had disappeared. It was nearing dusk.

He said, "I'll go along and see if there is anything to be learned at Mae's hotel. I suppose you had better put out a couple of men to hunt for her, Tom, and also to make the taxi and luggage check. Come on, Kim, you've got a passenger."

The hotel was a narrow-front building in a raffish area near the docks. Walking into a shoebox lobby, Tracy won-

dered who thought up the names for such places. This one called itself the Pacific Gem. It was located near Ilaniwai Street, as Tom had said. Tracy recalled having been in it several times before on various investigations.

Kim waited, in his cab. Tracy had briefed him sketchily on what had happened, with a warning that it was confidential.

Night was falling in Honolulu with tropical suddenness. Lights were coming on. The hotel clerk on duty, a nondescript character who had not bothered to shave recently, grunted with indifference when Tracy introduced himself and asked about Mae Gamble.

"The cops have already been here," he said, then spat derisively. "Not that they found out anything. They're like all cops everywhere, couldn't find a boil on their nose."

Tracy frowned at this; he had once been a member of the Honolulu Police Department and knew how high it rated. But he let the slur pass, asking, "Was there anything to find out?"

"You couldn't prove it by me. We got some dames living in this trap, B-girls mostly, taxi-dancers, that kind. I figured Gamble was one of them, though she seemed to have a little more class. But I didn't notice her much, didn't have a chance, she wasn't here long enough."

The same had been true of the Hawaiian Eye partners, Tracy thought. She hadn't been with them long enough to be noticed either, what with Tom Lopaka away on Maui and himself busy.

The receptionist's job required attractiveness and competence in office skills. Mae Gamble had scored quite high on all counts.

"Look," the Pacific Gem clerk said inquisitively, "what's she done that's got the cops after her?"

Tracy brought a money-clip from his pocket and extracted a bill. "I'd like a look at her room," he proposed.

The clerk eyed the bill and snickered. "Seems like private dicks ante higher than that on TV," he said.

TV was playing hob with the business of private investigations, Tracy reflected. He added another bill. The clerk took a key from a box and started to come around the desk.



Tracy plucked the key from his hand. "You must have things to do," he said. "I'll bring this back later."

He climbed a flight of box stairs to a narrow second-floor hall and moved along it, nose wrinkling at the smells this place contained. He found a door and used the key, opened the door and snapped on a light.

Tracy saw about what he had expected: a cheap, down-at-heels sort of room with windows which opened on the brick wall of a warehouse, with a narrow alley intervening. There was no bath, only a lavatory basin. A suitcase rested on a bed. It was unlocked. Tracy opened it and made a quick check, discovering no more than the police already had, that Mae Gamble had a pronounced taste for expensive lingerie.

Hotel stickers plastered on the suitcase indicated she had recently been in Naples, Cairo, Bombay, Singapore and Hong Kong. A Pan-American Airways luggage tag dangled from the handle.

Tracy glanced into a shallow closet, saw a blue dress with white pölka dots that he recognized, and a cloth coat with a fur collar.

The drawers of a bureau were empty. She had been living out of the suitcase.

The bureau top held an assortment of bottles. Most of them were empty, but two, one gin, one vodka, were partially full.

The hallway door creaked slightly, opening.

A beefy individual leaned against the jamb. Dark-skinned, his thick jet hair had an oily glitter and he wore a cheap red shirt and khaki pants. His feet were bare.

Thick lips set themselves in a rubbery, ingratiating smile. "You look for de kine wahine?" he asked.

Tracy, studying him intently, did not reply.

The man came on, feet shuffling on the worn reed rug. "You give de clerk money," he said. "I see, down de stairs. Maybe you give me money? Maybe I know somep'n."

A blunt forefinger tapped his chest. "Me Big Georgie. Beachboy."

Tracy smiled frostily. "You big liar. I know every beach-

boy on Waikiki. They wouldn't let you near the sand. Your name is George LaDew. I saw you in the line-up at headquarters about a year ago. You were charged with beating a woman, and drew sixty days. It should have been more, in my opinion."

The thick lips writhed in furious anger. The man moved with abrupt, surprising speed, throwing a knotted fist at Tracy's face.

A jerk of Tracy's head made it a narrow miss. Tracy pivoted into him and slugged him in the belly, a twisting, lifting blow. The other wheezed, bending a little, but struck again, knuckles skidding across Tracy's cheek under his left eye.

Tracy slid back, then in again. He jabbed twice, then crossed his right, putting it solidly alongside LaDew's jaw. The man slammed into a wall with a crash which seemed to shake the whole building. He sagged down to one knee and stayed there, shaking his head, rubbing a trickle of blood from his nose.

"Okay," he muttered sullenly. "I got enough."

Tracy studied him coldly. He shook out a cigarette, lighted it, then went to close the hall door. LaDew started to rise. Tracy turned, pointing with the cigarette. "Stay put. And talk."

"So what's to say?" LaDew muttered. "I know the dame. I'm just across the hall, and she invited me to get chummy. So I figured I might know something that would be worth a couple of bucks from you. But you shouldn't have slung that woman-beating rap at me. I don't like to hear about it. It was a bum rap, sixty days in the can for nothing."

Tracy snorted. The woman in the case, a sad trull from some dockside bar, had viewed the line-up at Queen Street also that day, to pick LaDew out. Tracy vividly recalled her swollen, lacerated face.

"Give," he ordered. "Everything you know."

"Well, this Gamble dame, I thought first maybe she's some kind of kook," LaDew said. "She's got good clothes and a fair amount of class, but still she moves into this hole. She tells me it's because she's nearly broke but that

she's going to have dough soon, a mountain of dough. Also that there'll be a cut for me if I stick around and see that nobody bothers her."

He shrugged. "The mountain of dough line I don't quite buy, but she lands a job and sets up liquor for me, so I hang around. But nobody comes along to bother her. Something is sure bugging her, though. Every time anybody even walks past her door she gets the shakes."

"No one tried to see her?" Tracy asked.

"Aside from me, not a soul. I begin to get an idea she's dumped some guy but that he ain't the kind to take a brush-off and she knows it. Is that what happened? Did he catch up with her? Is that why the cops came nosing in here?"

Tracy looked about, found an ash tray and stubbed out his cigarette. He noticed a glass, poured meagerly from the vodka bottle and swallowed. His cheek was beginning to sting.

LaDew, still on one knee, moistened his lips. "That's all I know, and it ought to be worth a buck or two. I've been awful short of eating dough lately."

Tracy considered, nodded, and produced his money-clip again. He dropped two singles on the floor. He walked out.

Down on the street, Kim stared as he approached and climbed in beside him. "Hey, Mr. Steele, you got a black eye!"

Tracy sighed. "I wish everything else about this business was as obvious as that fact, Kim. Let's head back to the office."

Velvety black night lay softly over Honolulu now, spangled by glittering stars which seemed only a little above the feather-duster crests of palms in the Hawaiian Village gardens. Softly strummed guitars furnished counterpoint for a liquid blending of voices in a gay song of the islands below the terrace where diners listened and looked at each other and spoke of possibly extending their stays just a day or so longer.

Kim said, bringing his cab to a stop, "You want me wait around a while?"

"No. Go get your supper, but then come back," Tracy replied. "You might be needed later."

Kim grinned. "Sure thing!"

The lights were on in Cricket's Corner, the shop adjoining the Hawaiian Eye office, where an assortment of photographs was on attractive display. Cricket was not in sight, however. Tracy palmed the office doorknob and walked in. The reception room was empty. Tom was talking on his phone in the lanai office. Brows lifting as he covered the mouthpiece with his hand, he said, "Greg's on the line. And what for Pete's sake happened to you?"

"Details later," Tracy said. "Let me have a word with our commuting partner."

He took the phone and said, "Aloha, Greg."

"And Aloha a nui to you!" Greg MacKenzie answered across two thousand miles of ocean. "Tracy, Tom was just telling me about the dust-up in those parts this afternoon. Need me back in a hurry?"

"I don't think so. How are you coming along?"

"Everything is nearly wrapped up. It's a case of fraud, all right, and Diamond Head Insurance doesn't have to pay a dime."

"Good work!" Tracy said. "They'll be glad to hear that."

Greg said, "I'm conferring with a key witness right now."

Tracy smiled. "Blonde or brunette—?"

Greg chuckled. "Just a moment. I'll ask." A moment of silence ensued. Then, "She says both, on occasion. At the moment, I think the trend is in between—most attractive, too. We're at the Top of the Mark, just arrived from dinner at Ernie's. What a night! The whole city is beneath us, and the bay, with the bridges all lighted up. I tell you, blalah, this is the town!"

"Methinks you protest too much," Tracy said. "No yearning for Aloha Tower and a rainbow over the Pali, no homesickness for the waves breaking on the beach and hula dancers under the palms—?"

"Blast it, you're hitting where it hurts." Greg sighed. "Much as it sounds like treason to Market Street and Twin Peaks, I can hardly wait to see all those things again."

"Come on home, then," Tracy said. "But there are a few slight chores you can handle first. About the dust-up that Tom mentioned, does the name Destin mean anything to you?"

"I recall vaguely having heard it out there. Isn't that one of the old island families?"

"Not nearly as old as some. They arrived about 1885, I think. Some years back the last of the line, mother and daughter, moved to San Francisco. Will you check and see what you can find out about them?"

"First thing tomorrow," Greg assured him. "Anything else?"

"Yes. Do you have any Navy contacts?"

"A few, mostly Waves."

"They might be the best kind," Tracy said, "if they're in the right offices. See if you can learn anything about a Lieutenant Jack Burrell, attached to O.N.I. I don't know his duty post."

From the corner of his eye Tracy noticed that Danny Quon had appeared at the reception room door.

"Wilco," Greg said. "Anything more from the kanaka?"

Tom took the phone again. "Nothing, Greg, except that I'll have Cricket start weaving a welcome home lei for you."

"Kiss her for me," Greg said. "No, I'll save that pleasure for myself. Roger and out."

Tom hung up. Danny Quon came on, with a measuring glance for Tracy's eye before he looked on toward the lanai and the pool. "We are three rockheads," he announced. "All of us ought to quit, start diving for nickels and dimes when the boats come in and leave detective work for somebody with brains!"

Tom studied him blankly. "Come again?" he said.

Tracy was also looking toward the pool. "He's talking about our place, Tom. I thought of it before, but didn't quite latch onto its significance, that there was a place we should have looked but didn't."

They rounded the pool, toward the apartments. Tracy's was downstairs, Tom's above it. Greg had a hotel suite not much more than a stone's throw away.

Tom opened Tracy's door. Tracy switched on the lights. The place was empty. It held a heavy, lingering odor of tobacco smoke. Tracy looking around, touched Quon's arm and pointed to a low coffee table in front of a divan. The table held an ash tray that was crowded with cigarette ends, all lipstick-stained.

"She was here," Tracy said. "All afternoon, smoking, waiting for it to be dark, when she slipped away. I would guess that our Miss Gamble hasn't been gone very long."

"About twenty minutes," Quon growled. "The girl at the hotel newsstand saw a woman go across the lobby into the hotel from the direction of your patio door, moving fast, holding a handkerchief to her face, and called me. I had been coming up with nothing, trying to figure where the Gamble woman was, where she went when she ducked out of your reception room this afternoon. Not until the call did it hit me there was one good place close by that none of us had thought to check, this place. She came in here."

"I'm the rockhead," Tom said. "There I was, moving between the office and the reception room, and all the time she was waiting, probably watching me, grabbing at last at the chance to get out through the patio and run."

Tracy was studying the ash tray. "Something about this doesn't make sense," he said. "Mae wasn't with us long, but long enough to know we came and went here constantly, that it wasn't a safe hide-out, that at any second one of us was quite likely to walk in and nab her. Also, she may have felt it was necessary to duck in here, maybe when Cricket and I appeared at the reception room, but why did she stay when she could have walked on through and out by way of the beach?"

"I don't know," Quon said. "But she was here and smoked a pack or more of cigarettes, waiting. She's gone again, knowing who clobbered Burrell; she must know, or she wouldn't be running. Well, I'm going to find her, and do it quick. She hasn't got another choice hide-out like this one open to her!"

There were a few more things to be discussed before Quon left.

He promised to check up on George LaDew.

About how the hotel had happened to hire Mae Gamble for its secretarial pool, Quon said, "Good secretaries are hard to come by, and she tested out better on shorthand, typing and PBX work than any applicant they have had in a long while. They didn't take her blind, of course, but cabled two references—her employment with the Destin family wasn't even mentioned—that she gave in San Francisco, and the answers were okay. So they hired her. Then she was referred immediately to you for your receptionist's job. That's standard operating procedure for filling the position when it is open—?"

Tom nodded. "We like to make our pick from the newest girls in the pool. That way, we hope to hold a receptionist for a while before she gets married, which seems to happen to all of them pretty quickly."

"Mae tested out fine for us, also," Tracy put in. "And she took hold of the job very competently. We didn't check back on her, knowing the hotel had already done that or she wouldn't have been hired."

"There was a gap of the last year and half on her application," Quon said. "She explained it by saying she had been traveling. I wonder why she wanted to conceal her employment with the Destins?"

If Mae Gamble's objective was blackmail, she would have had a positive reason for concealing that, Tracy thought. And Quon went on, "One thing more: She didn't slug Burrell with your koa-wood club. Nobody did. The lab checked it out and tells me the club wasn't used on him. There is no trace of hair or abraded skin visible under the microscope. So what was used as the weapon?"

They searched both apartments, the patio, the pool area, the lanai office, the reception room. They did not come up with a thing which might have served as the near-lethal object that had been used on Jack Burrell.

## Three

At nine o'clock that same evening Tracy strolled into the Shell Bar and Lounge which occupied a sizable corner of the hotel's ground floor, across the lobby from the Hawaiian Eye office. He had changed to a white dinner jacket and black tie and wore a patch over his injured eye, offered by Tom Lopaka, who had doctored it.

The lounge held a good crowd tonight. Cricket was singing on the stand, with the combo working behind her. She was doing one of the wistful love songs which suited her best. Cricket had a voice that was sweet and true and she could handle an audience like so many puppets, rendering listeners of both sexes misty-eyed and leaving them happy. She had quite a host of admirers.

The music sighed softly and Cricket sang of a man who had thrown her over. She looked very angelic, with her hair in a shimmering ponytail. Tracy ordered a stinger. He lifted the glass to her. Cricket apparently did not notice him.

Moke, the night man at the Hawaiian Eye office, came along to watch her for a moment, smiling, before he murmured, "The call you expected came in, Mr. Steele, from your contact at the Naval Hospital at Aiea. Lieutenant Burrell has not recovered consciousness. An operation is planned for tomorrow morning to remove bone fragments and to relieve pressure on the brain. His condition is regarded as serious but not critical. Everybody is very close-mouthed about his service status, but your guess that he is AWOL seems to be correct."



Moke, neat and handsome in an olive-gray uniform, was as Polynesian as poi, but there was very little ukelele strumming or beach lounging in his make-up. He was smart, conscientious, utterly dependable.

He continued, "The men you have searching for Miss Gamble have reported that they are hard at work."

Moke was referring to two private operatives who frequently handled assignments for Hawaiian Eye.

He meditated a moment and added, "A strange young woman, Miss Gamble. I tried to become friendly with her, in our few contacts, but she had her guard up—not only against me, I felt, but against the world."

Moke left. Cricket had finished her number and had spied Tracy after all for she was making her way between tables toward him.

He considered her as she approached. Cricket was several persons in one. As sharp as a Yankee trader in running her shop and business ventures, as perceptive as a woman of the world in making a successful career for herself as a night-club singer, she still was quite young and naïve in many respects.

She was, as a nice girl should be, made of sugar and spice, which could have made for a somewhat cloying personality. However, her make-up also included a dash of cayenne pepper and a strong pinch of gunpowder. The result was an unpredictability which was Cricket's chief charm. She was never dull.

Most of the time the partners regarded her as a slightly fey but wholly lovable younger sister, which was not to Cricket's liking at all. She did not want to be anyone's younger sister. In particular, she did not care for such a relationship with Tracy Steele.

She said, facing him, "Why are you wearing that patch?"

"I'm bucking for pirate, junior grade, lover," Tracy replied. "This is the first step. Next week, if I swash and buckle just right, maybe I'll get to swing a cutlass."

"I don't know why I ask questions. I never get a sensible answer," Cricket said. Then she plunged into what was really on her mind, "When a certain person lets another certain person sit on the beach for literally hours, waiting

in vain, then that certain person is liable to be very sorry, because the other certain person might not be around any longer!"

"I couldn't agree more—I think," Tracy said. "Who are all of those persons? Friends of ours, perhaps?"

"An exceedingly nice gentleman from Texas came along who was very happy to take me surfing," Cricket said loftily. "He is handsome, has scads of oil wells and cattle and is most interested in me. Most interested!"

"As he should be," Tracy said approvingly. "Where is this gentleman? I would like to buy him a drink, or vice-versa, and commend him on his good taste."

Cricket looked suddenly confused. "He promised he would stop by to hear me sing. But I—I haven't seen him yet—"

"Ah, the witchery of the island night and the dark beguiling eyes of Hawaii's beauties!" Tracy sighed. "They mesmerize so many good men into forgetting their promises."

"Oh, you!" Cricket said furiously.

"Don't let it depress you, lover," Tracy counseled. "With all due respect to the great and noble state of Texas, I don't really think it could replace Honolulu in your affections, no matter how scadsy the oil wells and cattle are."

Cricket glared. She whirled away and left him. Tracy had the immediate and somewhat guilty thought that he shouldn't rib her so much.

He saw Cricket encounter Tom Lopaka, coming in, and heard her exclaim, "Don't you dare say a single word to me!"

Tom joined Tracy. "What is making Mademoiselle Mauna Loa erupt now?" he inquired.

"A matter of great consequence which she will no doubt have forgotten an hour from now," Tracy replied. "Drink, partner?"

"No, thanks. I'm on my way to pick up a date at the Royal Hawaiian." Then he reconsidered. "Well, maybe I'll have a quick one while contributing another bit to the Yolanda Destin-Mae Gamble puzzle, if there is one that involves both of them."

"In the trenchant words of Danny Quon, five will get you ten that there is a puzzle," Tracy said. "What is the bit?"

"I have just had a brief chat with Fred Kawano of the Mercantile Trust. Without knowing the exact figures, since his own bank is not involved, Fred estimates that the income from the Destin estate probably runs up to a hundred thousand dollars a quarter. And Yolanda is sole beneficiary."

Tracy whistled softly. "A six-figure income every three months; the lady is loaded! Did Fred also hazard a guess as to whether she has the spending of all that loot, with no strings attached?"

"He said the money was left by Yolanda's father for her in some sort of trust—but it is not, he thinks, a spendthrift trust."

"Even if it is, a sizable chunk is no doubt available to pay off Mae Gamble, assuming Mae is embarked on a venture involving blackmail," Tracy said meditatively.

"What has happened today argues that Mae is making the try, all right," Tom pointed out.

"Perhaps—if we could only figure out how and where Burrell fits in," Tracy said. "Could he be sharing in whatever it is that Mae is trying?" But he shook his head. "No. That doesn't seem to add up. An officer in Naval Intelligence is investigated right down to the marrow of his bones, continuously. If there was larceny in him, it would have been uncovered."

"I have a feeling we may have reached some wrong conclusion about Burrell," Tom said. "But suppose we let it go until tomorrow?"

"Right," Tracy agreed. "And even then several other matters will demand our attention."

"You're telling me?" Tom said wryly. "I have to go to the mat with the Jolo people again tomorrow. Their account is worth about five thousand a year net to us, and are they determined to make us earn it!"

"We aim to please," Tracy chuckled. "Have fun on your date, Tom. I'll stick close to the office and check occasionally with those guys we've got hunting Mae."

He sipped his stinger as Tom Lopaka sauntered away, and told himself they mustn't let the Mae Gamble-Burrell matter absorb too much of their time. Hawaiian Eye's commercial protection accounts provided the firm's income and demanded full-time attention. But he had a feeling this private case would take over and dominate them.

The eye-patch bothered him. He took it off.

Then perfume with a delicate bit of sandalwood assailed his nostrils and Yolanda Destin was standing beside him, now wearing something in blue silk, strapless, which emphasized the golden tint of her arms and shoulders and a somewhat more than discreet display of her bosom.

Full lips parted in a hesitant smile as she murmured, "Could I speak to you, please—Tracy—?"

They were presently at a table in a corner, at some distance from Cricket, who was now beginning another set.

Yolanda said, "I had to find out if you had any news about Mae."

She had already spoken an explanation about becoming restless in the big Destin house out in Nuuanu Valley. Too worried about Mae Gamble to resign herself to an evening of waiting, she had decided to return to the hotel and had done so, by taxi.

Tracy said, "It might help matters if you were to level with me. I have a feeling you didn't give your true reason this afternoon. Just exactly why do you want so much to get in touch with her?"

Yolanda hesitated. He offered a cigarette. She accepted it, then leaned to the flame of his lighter, putting a hand over his. The light touch started a pleasant tingling in him.

Then Yolanda said, "Men. Mae becomes easily involved and finds herself in trouble. I am afraid, from several indications, that she is entangled with a new one. I want to find and help her, if she needs me."

She sighed, dark eyes fixed on him in what was apparently only anxious candor. "Mae left me rather tempestuously. Both of us have tempers, and we had a fight. I regret that now. And I can't tell myself to forget her,

that it is no longer any concern of mine, not with the feeling I have that she may be in trouble."

Tracy said, "How could she be involved with a man when she has arrived so recently in Honolulu?"

"I have asked myself that question. The only answer I can offer is that it may be a man from Mae's past, someone whom she encountered again here."

He tried a long shot. "Do you know a man named Burrell?"

Her brow ridged faintly. She studied her cigarette. The sweet murmur of Cricket's voice was all about them. A waiter brought their drink. Yolanda had ordered bourbon on the rocks.

She shook her head, presently. "I'm afraid it doesn't register. That may not have much significance, though. I'm rather vague about names."

"You might remember his appearance," Tracy said, and described Jack Burrell.

Her frown persisted. "This is very odd. I don't know the man you're talking about, but I may have seen him today—in your office."

Tracy lighted for himself. She went on, "You see, I was there twice this afternoon. The first time he was there all alone. I started to speak, but he stopped me, saying he didn't work in the place but was just waiting for someone to come in. So I backed out, and walked along the beach for a while."

Yolanda nibbled at her lip. "I had a sudden feeling that I might get myself entangled in all sorts of things if I returned. But then I thought about Mae and realized I had to go through with it, to do something to find her, in a hurry. So I went back the second time, and you were there."

Tracy occupied himself with a sip of his second stinger, considering what she had told him. Was Yolanda speaking the truth? If so, where had Mae Gamble been when Burrell had arrived at the office?

Yolanda leaned toward him again. The soft lights of the lounge enhanced her startling beauty. He found himself

thinking of how fortune had favored her, lavishing not only loveliness but great wealth as well.

She said, "Is—is Mae involved with the man you described, the one I saw?"

"I don't know," Tracy replied. "He—left, before I had an opportunity to talk to him."

"Oh?" Yolanda thought of this, perhaps wondering how he even knew of the man, then let it go. She said, "I had another reason for wanting to see you tonight."

She opened her gold mesh bag and brought out a flat packet of bills, doubled over once and held by a money-clip, also gold. She unfastened the packet and spread it out.

At a quick estimate, Tracy thought, there was more than a thousand dollars on the table. He said, "Do you think it is wise to carry that much money around with you?"

"I don't usually have quite so much. I wondered if it would be enough; I wanted to pay you something for your services but didn't know about your fee."

He smiled. "There is no need to worry about that. Our charge is nominal on a case of this type, fifty dollars a day and expenses, including the cost of any outside operatives we may use. You can pay later after receiving our statement, and it should be done by check so you'll have a record of the transaction."

"But I can't pay by check—!" Yolanda caught herself, and hurriedly continued, "Are you sure you wouldn't like something in advance?"

"I'm quite sure," Tracy said. "Please put the money back in your purse."

She did so reluctantly, then went on, "There's another thing. I must warn you about someone—"

But she caught herself again, looked past him and said, "Oh, damn! Speak of the devil!"

Her exclamation was half angry, half apprehensive. Tracy glanced around and saw a man approaching them.

He was slender, about Tracy's height, with a narrow, knife-blade sort of head, features that were handsome but cold, a long thin nose, tight mouth, a hard shelf of chin, pale gray eyes that held the glassy sheen of marbles. Thin-

ning grayish-brown hair was brushed neatly against his skull.

He wore a beige silk suit with the marks of expert Hong Kong tailoring, and carried a rattan cane, apparently from necessity for his left foot dragged a little. The man reached the table and stopped. The marble eyes flicked Tracy Steele in appraising disdain, then dismissed him and settled on the woman. He said, "I thought it was agreed we were to stay in tonight."

"I—I changed my mind," she responded. And, "Tracy, this is Ralph Cotter, my cousin. Ralph, Tracy Steele."

Standing up, Tracy offered his hand. Cotter ignored the gesture. He said to the woman, "This has gone far enough. Your sudden concern for Mae Gamble is at an end, here and now. I will not have it. Further involvement in her misadventures could result in unfavorable talk and publicity, and I am determined that neither is going to happen. Come along, now. We are leaving."

The effect of his brusque words was galvanic. Tracy saw Yolanda Destin's lips writhe, saw the dark eyes spark furiously and her bosom lift as she drew an angry breath. Then she thrust her chair back and lunged to her feet, so violently that the chair overturned. Voice rising, she cried, "Leave me alone! I don't have to go with you! I won't go—I!"

Her features were distorted. It was a startling display of temper, which centered the attention of others in the lounge on her.

Cotter put a hand on her arm above the elbow, gripping tightly. He snapped, "Be quiet! Your talent for making scenes is not going to be displayed again. My tolerance has a limit, and it has been reached. I have warned you before of what can happen if you behave like this. Must I warn you again?"

Color ebbed from the woman's face, and her anger was gone as abruptly as it had flared. She looked down at the table, lips trembling.

Cotter, still gripping her arm, fingers indenting the golden flesh, glanced now to Tracy. "Steele, Miss Destin revealed to me earlier her act in retaining your firm. You

will send a statement itemizing whatever services you may have rendered. If reasonable, it will be paid promptly, and you will regard the matter as closed."

"Miss Destin retained the services of my firm," Tracy said, voice inflectionless. "If Miss Destin wishes to discontinue them, let her say so."

"No. I say so," Cotter rejoined. "I have complete charge of her affairs, by virtue of power of attorney which is binding in all matters. I advise you not to make the mistake of attempting to challenge that fact." And to the woman again, "Now we shall leave."

He released her. She went with him, eyes still lowered, with no further glance for Tracy.

He watched them move away across the room and out. Cotter's limp, Tracy noticed, was more pronounced than when he had approached the table.

A waiter came to right the overturned chair. "I thought there might be another explosion like last night," he remarked.

Tracy's thoughts were elsewhere. "Louie, bring me a phone, please," he said. "Quickly!"

With the instrument plugged in, he dialed. Moke's voice answered.

"Moke, a man and woman are just leaving on the street side," Tracy said, and gave a hurried description. "Kim should be out there; I asked him to wait around this evening. Tell him to tail those two, and see where they go. They'll probably head for the Destin house in Nuuanu, but I want to know for sure."

"I'll tell Kim right away, Mr. Steele," Moke said.

Cricket had finished her set and was coming across the lounge. From her expression, this was to be no ribbing session. Cricket's features were tight and resolute. They also included something he had not seen before, an emotion he could not quite define.

"Lover, you were never in better voice," he said, rising to greet her.

She ignored the compliment. "Tracy, we've got to talk about that woman. She was involved in something that happened here last night. Maybe you have heard about it



already from somebody else, but I'm going to tell you what I saw anyway."

Tracy remembered Cricket's attitude in the office earlier today, with Yolanda present, remembered Tom's remark that she had been edgy about something. "Why, no, I haven't heard—" he began.

"She did something terrible," Cricket said. "You know Marty Fong, the nice young waiter who is working his way through law school? Well, Marty spilled a drink on her. It was an accident; I saw it all, because she was sitting close to the stand. We had quite a crowd, and a man bumped against Marty, joggling his arm. Marty tried to apologize, but she wouldn't listen, screaming at him and using words that—well, the air was absolutely blue. Marty tried to calm her down. She slapped him. Even more, she clawed his face. There was blood on his cheek. And she called him a stupid, s-slant-eyed clown—"

This, Tracy thought, was the reason why Danny Quon had become interested in Yolanda Destin. Such an incident would undoubtedly have reached his attention, would have caused him to check up on her.

Tracy said, "Cricket, don't get so worked up."

"Well, it made me boiling mad! And I still feel that way. I jumped down from the stand and grabbed her arms from behind. I just wish she had tried to scratch my face! But she didn't. Paul got there"—she meant the Lounge's maître d'—"and told Marty to clear out. Then Paul tried to soothe her, but she snatched up her purse and rushed away."

The woman had an explosive temper; Tracy had seen it start to flare again, only moments ago when Ralph Cotter had told Yolanda Destin she must not engage in any more scenes.

Cricket continued, "I went after Marty. He was in the kitchen, crying, afraid he would lose his job. Marty is married, you know, and his wife is expecting a baby. Things are rather hard for him, trying to work nights and go to school days."

"I'll speak to Paul," Tracy said. "I'm sure Marty has nothing to fear."

"Paul wouldn't be so unfair as to fire him," Cricket said. "He has Marty working in the pantry for a while, so there won't be any danger of him encountering her again, with possibly more trouble."

Tracy said, "That isn't going to happen. And I'm also sure Miss Destin regrets her hasty action."

"I'll just bet she does!" Cricket said. "I haven't heard that she wants to apologize."

Cricket studied Tracy then, and he saw that the other emotion he had noted was apprehension.

She said in a sudden burst, "Don't have anything more to do with that woman, Tracy! Please don't!"

He said, "Now, Cricket—"

The plea, and its intensity, were surprising. He was accustomed to Cricket fussing at him about women, his feminine clients and his dates, but this was the first time she had pleaded with him to drop one completely.

"I'm afraid of her," Cricket said. "I have a feeling that she means bad trouble, Tracy!"

He sighed. Cricket had been too much around the Hawaiian Eye office, Tracy thought. She was beginning to acquire melodramatic notions.

Then he remembered that she was remarkably acute at sizing people up. It was just possible that Cricket might be right in her judgment.

But Tracy shook his head. He was accustomed to making judgments also, and standing by them, and he was in complete disagreement with what Cricket had said. If there was bad trouble, Yolanda Destin was in it. He had to help her.

The phone on his table rang.

"Kim is on the job, Mr. Steele," Moke said. "Those two got into a new Cadillac, with the man driving, and Kim pulled out right behind them."

## Four

Kim kept his cab moving at a steady pace, about a quarter of a mile behind the new Cadillac. He had identified it as being from a rental agency to which he frequently referred customers on commission. The car rolled along Beretania Street, then began to swing toward Nuuanu Valley, veering around the Punchbowl and past Queen's Hospital.

Kim thought of a luau tonight over at Maunalua, plenty to eat, plenty of girls, dancing and fun until dawn. He had passed it up because Tracy Steele had said there might be something he could do for Hawaiian Eye. Now the something had materialized.

Driving a taxi was all right. It provided a good living for Kim and his mother. His great, all-consuming ambition, though, was to be a full-fledged operative for Hawaiian Eye.

Mr. Steele kept saying wait a little while yet and grow up some more. But—auwe!—how much did he have to grow up before he was ready? In Kim's own opinion he was as much of a man as he was ever going to be.

Maybe this was the night when he could prove to Mr. Steele that he was ready. Maybe he could do a little something extra to clinch the point beyond any need for further argument. Kim gripped his wheel hard at this exciting thought.

The Cadillac was moving well into the valley now, climbing toward the mountains. New housing clustered thickly for a while, then began to thin out. The Cadillac made a

sudden left turn onto a narrow, little-used side road which ran for a quarter of a mile and ended at the hulking old Destin mansion, ghostly in the darkness.

Kim felt a sense of disappointment as he stopped at the turn-off from Nuuanu Avenue into the side road and looked on as the Cadillac made the run into the grounds of the Destin house and its lights flicked off.

He knew about the Destin place. It occupied five acres or so of land, which in present day Hawaii was a sizable private holding, very valuable.

As far back as Kim could remember there had never been anybody living there. The place was closed up tight, most windows boarded over, only a caretaker on hand, a cranky old man named McLarnin.

Kim's mother had told him stories of other days when lights had blazed from all of those windows, when big parties were given. Then something had happened, and all at once the Destins had gone away. Indefinite rumors whispered that there had been some kind of pilikia, trouble; they had gone away and had never come back.

Now somebody was back and Mr. Steele was interested in them. Kim debated with himself for a moment, switched off the lights of his cab and started toward the place on foot. Maybe he could find out something to tell Mr. Steele other than that he had just followed a rented Cadillac up here.

The night held bland magic. There was no moon, but the stars were blazing beacons. The spreading nimbus of light from Honolulu was behind Kim as he moved slowly along the road. On his left was a high fence of iron palings, each topped by a sharp point. Kim came to a wide gate, which he discovered was closed and locked.

Beyond the gate there was a long graveled drive. He peered between the iron palings and saw the Cadillac on the drive. A light showed at the front of the house, shining through shuttered windows, beyond a wide veranda.

After another momentary debate, Kim took hold of the gate palings. He scrambled up with quick agility, careful to avoid the sharp iron points. He swung himself over and dropped down on the other side, stood for a moment

with his heart thudding, then slanted to his right, toward a flagstone walk which led to the front of the house and the deep veranda.

There had been formal gardens here once, but now, long untended, the whole area was choked by high jungle tangles of weeds and plants which had gone wild. A double line of coco palms bordered the walk. Kim flitted from one to another of these palms. If he could only get up on the veranda, he thought, and take a quick look through a window, there was a chance to learn something that, casually offered, would show Mr. Steele he had plenty of enterprise and initiative and was ready to be trusted with important jobs.

Kim was fifty feet or so from the front of the house when a sudden angry cry from a woman froze him against one of the palms. An instant later the front door burst open, with light spilling out, and the woman appeared, running. She crossed the veranda, ran down half a dozen steps to the walk, tripped and fell to one knee, scrambled up and ran on, directly toward Kim.

Somebody else came through the door, rushing across the veranda also and down the steps silently, rushing after the woman, quickly closing the distance between them and running her down.

At sight of him, every hair on Kim's head seemed to shoot straight up. The man was monstrously big. To Kim's startled eyes he seemed at least ten feet tall, someone who loomed over the woman as he clamped a hand to her shoulder and jerked her around. She slapped and pummeled at him, crying out fretfully.

The man picked her up in his arms. He carried her back to the house. The woman kicked frantically. Her arms flailed as she tried vainly to break free. She cried, "Put me down, you stumblebum!"

There was no response. She was carried back across the veranda. The front door closed. Silence ensued.

Kim gulped, swallowing hard. He turned and went at the fence, scrambling over it any way he could, heedless now of the sharp points on the iron palings, hearing cloth tear as one of them ripped his aloha shirt.

He fell on the other side, a jarring fall, picked himself up and ran to his cab. He crammed himself under the wheel, started the motor, wrenched the cab around in a U-turn and then rammed the accelerator down. The car leaped forward with a celerity which snapped his head painfully. Kim hardly noticed. His one thought was to get away from there as fast as he could travel.

"You saw a giant?" Tracy Steele said, brows lifting.

Kim was still breathing hard. "Big like a house!" he cried, and stood on tiptoe with one hand lifted as high as he could thrust it, by way of illustration. "Even more tall, Mr. Steele!"

They were in the reception room, where Tracy had been checking the reports from the two operatives seeking Mae Gamble, all negative so far. It was now nearly eleven. Moke, standing at one side and listening with a skeptical smile, said, "No giants on record in the islands that I know of. Maybe you saw a night-walker, Kim."

His reference was to the fabled gods of old Hawaii who were said to come down from the mountains by night, their tread so heavy it made the earth shake.

Kim glared at him. "Very funny!" he snapped. "Mo bet-tah you go there and take look. Maybe you grin then on other side of face!"

"Simmer down," Tracy said. "I'm interested in the woman whom you say that you also glimpsed. Can you describe her?"

Kim thought hard and shook his head. "All happen too quick," he replied.

"Was she wearing a blue strapless evening dress?"

"Yes, blue," Kim said. "And no straps. I remember now her shoulders all bare."

Tracy thought about it. He had no doubt the incident had occurred substantially as Kim had related. All that he was discounting was the size of the man involved. Kim's startled eyes had probably exaggerated his dimensions.

There had been the clash of wills between Yolanda Destin and Ralph Cotter in the Shell Lounge. Her temper had almost exploded then, until stifled by Cotter's words. It

could have really flared up, Tracy thought, after she had returned to the house with Cotter, the woman then rushing out, someone pursuing her and taking her back.

Someone. A big man. How did he fit into the puzzle which had started with the disappearance of Mae Gamble?

"I suppose I had better go and see what I can find out," Tracy decided.

"Lieutenant Quon might be interested," Moke suggested.

Tracy smiled. "Danny has probably knocked off for the day and is in bed by now. He would fry my hide if I got him up to look for a giant. No, I'll handle it myself and take my own car so I can keep in touch with you, Moke. There is no doubt a logical explanation. I shouldn't be gone very long."

"I could go too, show you the way," Kim offered eagerly. Nothing could have persuaded him to return to the Destin house alone this night, but going with Mr. Steele would be a different matter.

"I doubt if I would get lost, but—yes, you can come," Tracy agreed. "And about that fence at the front of the place, it's rather high as I recall."

"Pretty high," Kim agreed ruefully. "I tear my shirt."

"Well, I'm not as keen on scrambling over fences as I was in my younger years," Tracy said. "Maybe there is another way to get over that one. Wait here. I'll be right back."

He left, going around the patio, now lighted by several luau torches which spread a golden shimmer on the pool, and into his apartment. Within two minutes he returned, with a question for Moke, "Have you any idea what might have happened to the collapsible aluminum stepladder that I keep on my service porch?"

Moke looked blank. "No, Mr. Steele."

"Make a note to check with the hotel housekeeper. It may have been borrowed for some reason," Tracy said. Then he nodded to Kim. "Maybe we'll have to do some climbing after all. Let's go."

They went out together and around to the hotel garage. Lights were still burning in the display windows at Cricket's Corner; they would go off automatically at midnight. Music came from the Shell Lounge. Tracy had a glimpse of

Cricket in the lobby. She called out and started toward him. He lifted his hand in greeting but shook his head and lengthened his stride, indicating he was in a hurry. He did not want a renewal of the discussion on Yolanda Destin.

Kim trotted alongside him. "I not make any of it up, Mr. Steele," he said.

"We'll see," Tracy said.

"Funny thing," Kim went on thoughtfully, "I pretty sure now the big man not a haole."

"You mean he is a Hawaiian?" Tracy asked.

"Maybe not that, just that he not a haole," Kim said. "Maybe mixed blood."

Perhaps, Tracy thought. Hawaii was the world's greatest melting pot. The majority of present-day islanders represented a potpourri of every race and nation on earth. Kim, beside him, was an excellent example of that.

Tom Lopaka was another. Tom's maternal grandmother and paternal grandfather had both been Hawaiian, and the rest of Tom was a mixture of Scotch, Irish and Spanish.

Tracy was somewhat envious of Tom's background, quite exotic in comparison with his own humdrum Anglo-Saxon heritage. Tom had a distinct advantage when it came to impressing pretty visitors from the mainland.

The new Chrysler that Tracy was driving, an indication in itself of how well things were going with Hawaiian Eye, made the run quickly to Nuuanu. Absently handling the wheel, he reflected again, as he frequently had in the past, that Hawaiian nights were the improbable invention of somebody who had tried for perfection and had almost achieved it.

The same, however, might be said for Hawaiian days.

This was the spot for him. He had known it at once upon arriving here, after a spell of restless drifting following university in California, climaxed by a stint in the frozen hell of Korea. He meant for Hawaii to be his home from now on.

The gentle sorcery of the islands made slaves of virtually everyone. Even Greg MacKenzie, almost militant at the outset in his determination to remain loyal to San Francisco, was succumbing. Tracy suddenly found himself won-



dering again why the Destins had left, what the pilikia was that had driven them away.

He made the turn into the short side road fronting the Destin place and stopped.

Kim muttered, "Still a light on at house."

Tracy saw it, a light against a window at the front. He reached for the dashboard microphone and said, "Steele to Control."

Moke answered instantly, speaking into the mike at the receptionist's desk in the office, "Right here, Mr. Steele."

"Anything stirring?" Tracy asked.

"Quiet night," Moke responded. "Miss Blake came in shortly after you left, and tried to find out where you had gone with Kim, and why."

Tracy smiled and said, "I trust you offered a suitably inscrutable reply."

"Well, I did sort of double-talk her into flouncing out." Moke chuckled.

"Stay by the set," Tracy said. "I'm at the front of the Destin place. There is a light on, so I am going to the house. I don't anticipate trouble, but after Kim's reference to a giant there is just no telling. I might have to call for reinforcements. One thing more: If Tom comes in, tell him where I am."

"Check," Moke said.

Tracy hung up and got out of the car. Kim had already left it and was prowling along the high iron fence. Tracy moved to join him, noting the shoulder of a hill just beyond where the side road ended. Over that hill, he knew, was one of the reservoirs which husbanded the water supply of the city of Honolulu.

Kim was shaking the big gate. "Still locked," he reported. "You have to climb over."

"Perhaps not," Tracy said. "Let's explore a bit."

He worked on along the fence. Tracy had seen the Destin house several time previously from the Nuuanu road. It was one of the sights of the city, like the Aloha Tower and the Kamahameha statue, a lingering relic from the days of Hawaiian royalty, mid-Victorian in style, incredibly ugly by

modern standards with its numerous gables, turrets and cupolas.

When it had been built, Tracy thought, the house must have been a long morning's drive from downtown Honolulu by carriage over sandy roads. He wondered how many rooms might be contained in its ungainly hulk, ghostly gray by starlight.

He came to another gate, a small one, with a path meandering into the grounds beyond. He pushed, and it swung squeakily open.

"No climbing needed," Tracy remarked. "Somebody must have forgotten to lock this gate. Kim, you wait at the car. And no yelling at Moke if you happen to hear some weeds rustling in the wind!"

Kim stiffened, somewhat offended. "You're talking like I just a kid," he grumbled.

Tracy smiled, squeezing his shoulder. "On the other hand, if I'm not back in about half an hour you're to call Moke. He'll know what to do. You've got that? Good."

He went through the gate and along the path.

Gravel rattled slightly under his feet. The undergrowth was thick and rank on either side, almost head-high. There was a sickly-sweetish odor of decay in the air which wrinkled Tracy's nostrils. Why in the devil, he wondered, had the place been abandoned and allowed to go so completely to seed?

Why was it even still here? The land must be extremely valuable. Such a property, if placed on the market, would be the subject of immediate frenzied bidding. Why was the Destin estate—which Tracy supposed for all practical purposes meant Ralph Cotter—still holding onto it but making no use of the acreage other than to let it degenerate into an eyesore?

The path, he discovered, was curving around to the side of the house instead of approaching its front. He stopped, with a house wall on his left, a faint wash of illumination falling from above, where somebody had turned on a light in a second-floor room. He started to turn back, thinking that he would have to fight his way through the tangles to the front door.

A shadow suddenly moved before him, silently approaching. Tracy sent a look at what was casting the shadow, and felt his hair, like Kim's, lift in startled amazement.

This was someone big, all right. He seemed at first glance to be ten feet tall as Kim had claimed, though Tracy realized the faint light and the long shadow preceding him had contributed to this effect. Still, he towered over Tracy Steele, who touched a respectable six feet.

The man stopped. He said, voice incongruously thin and piping. "You not belong here. You go."

Tracy replied, "I want to see Mr. Cotter. Take me to him."

Perhaps a head-shake at this request; he was not sure. "No," the other said. "You go."

"Look," Tracy said, "I'm not a prowler. I am here on legitimate business. Take to me Mr. Cotter."

"You go!" the man said, voice rising now, and rushed him, hands reaching out, grabbing at his arms with an effect of pincers closing on the flesh.

Tracy reacted instantly. He did not care for having hands laid on him for any reason, and he also had no intention of being hustled ignominiously out—perhaps even carried, as Kim had said a woman had been carried by this hulking giant. From the strength in those hands, he might be capable of doing it. Tracy slashed a judo cut at the man's neck, having to swing his hand high to do it.

Tracy Steele had virtually reached black belt ranking in judo. He was pretty good and could more than hold his own in weekly workouts at the police gym. The blow he delivered guaranteed several minutes of deep slumber for any ordinary man.

It had no discernible effect on this one. More, Tracy had the startled impression that there was virtually no neck for his hand to chop into. His flesh tingled from slicing contact with a very hard skull.

If judo would not do it, perhaps karate would. Tracy used the karate solar plexus blow, fingers extended and stiff, tight together, his hand driving deep into the man's mid-section like a javelin.

It made the other grunt hard. Then his hands were on

Tracy again, closing, gripping, twisting and wrenching him. He was jerked off his feet, shaken, and hurled headlong at the house wall. Tracy hit it solidly. Everything went blank. He was in a bottomless black well, falling.

## Five

"You all right, Mr. Steele? Say you all right—!"

It was Kim, gasping anxiously in his ear. Liquid dripped on his face, then something clammy brushed his cheek. A blinding light, up close, suddenly shone in his eyes. He muttered in angry protest, jerking his head back and forth.

Lieutenant Danny Quon spoke from behind the light, "He's coming around. Stop slapping him with that wet handkerchief, Kim. I don't think he likes it."

Tracy pushed Kim aside and got creakily to his feet, swayed giddily and said, "Danny, point your damned light somewhere else."

"I wanted a look at your eyes," Quon replied. "They were all white for a moment. Tracy, what in blazes happened to you?"

Looking about, Tracy saw that he was where he had been last, still on the path beside the house.

"You won't believe me when I tell you," he sighed, grimacing and rubbing the back of his head. "However—a giant was playing handball here. I was the ball."

"I believe you," Quon said. "I've been listening to Kim. He can dream up some fancy stories trying to beat traffic tickets, but I detected a ring of truth in his talk about a giant. Where did the giant go?"

"Back up the beanstalk, maybe. I wasn't in any condition to notice," Tracy replied. "Incidentally, what are you doing here? Did Kim summon you, via Moke?"

"No. I stopped by your office and ran into Miss Blake."

"Cricket talked you into coming here?" Tracy said incredulously.

Quon snorted. "If I listened every time that young lady wants me to do something I would never get anything else done! Besides, she didn't know where you had gone, wanted me to rush off in all directions, hunting for you, I suppose. After talking to Moke I decided, with Mae Gamble still missing, that I had better do some checking, just in case. It's probably a good thing I did. Otherwise, that giant might have salted you down for breakfast."

"As Kim would remark, very funny!" Tracy said. "Who found me?"

"Both of us together," Quon said. "You were on your back, peacefully slumbering. I think I must have come along, Kim guiding me, only a couple of minutes after you started your nap."

"Big boy must have just gone off and left me," Tracy said. "It has a very odd-ball touch."

"This is something new, where you're concerned?" Quon said dryly. "To complete the record, Kim filled his hat from a puddle nearby and started throwing water in your face. How do you feel now? Should I call an ambulance?"

It was Tracy's turn to snort. "Come on!" he said.

"Well, go sit in your car, then. I'll find out what is going on here."

"We'll find out together," Tracy said, and started back along the path, around the corner of the house and into the rank greenery. It was damp. Some of it was thorny. Vines brushed his legs with a queasy suggestion of wriggling snakes. Quon came plowing after him. Kim brought up the rear.

Tracy's head held a dull throbbing. There was a sizeable lump toward the crown, probably where he had hit the house. He was beginning to feel a few scattered aches as well.

He reached the flagstoned walk between the coco palms, and climbed the steps to the wide veranda. A light was still burning beyond a shuttered window on his right.

Quon passed him and pounded with a clenched fist on

the front door, waited a moment and pounded again.

A bolt was pulled on the other side. The door—it was wide and high, with inlaid panels which showed much fancy scrollwork—squeaked as the gate had, opening with a protest of warped wood and dry hinges.

Ralph Cotter looked out at them. He now wore a maroon robe of heavy silk over yellow pajamas, and leaned on a cane.

Quon displayed his badge. "I have some questions to ask you. May I come in?"

Cotter looked past him at Tracy, frowning. "Must that man accompany you?" Then he shrugged, before Quon could answer. "Oh, very well."

He turned away, putting his weight on his cane, limping heavily, dragging his left foot.

Stepping over the threshold, Tracy found himself in a cavernous room which stretched completely across the front of the house. Directly in front of him was a wide curving staircase which rose to the second floor. The big room held a good deal of furniture, all of it hidden by cloth covers save for a leather armchair to which Cotter moved, seating himself.

"I must sit," he informed Quon. "As a child I was afflicted with a touch of polio which left me with a bad leg. It is aching fiendishly tonight."

The room was lighted by a few bulbs in a large crystal chandelier which hung from the ceiling on gilded chains. Off at one side, partially obscured in shadows, Tracy discerned a large portrait of a bold-featured man whose somewhat long iron-gray hair curled about his ears. He had a fierce nose and chisel chin, and wore a brass-buttoned coat, a wing collar and black string tie. It was not a very good portrait, but the artist had managed to catch a hot glitter in protuberant eyes which seemed to glare at Tracy.

Cotter continued, speaking to Quon, "It might help if I knew your official status."

"Lieutenant, head of Homicide Division," Quon answered.

Cotter's thin brows lifted at this. "Homicide?"

"I am not here in that capacity," Quon assured him, "but to investigate an occurrence that was reported to me."

He told what it was, the woman running from the house, the giant pursuing her, carrying her back inside.

Cotter's lips tightened in exasperation. He turned his head toward the rear of the place and shouted, interrupting Danny Quon, "Aponi! Come in here!"

There was an odor in the place which mingled dust, mildew and decay. Tracy noticed stains on the silver wallpaper where the rains of many years had seeped through.

He heard a door creak open, heard a hesitant shuffle of bare feet against wood, and saw the giant.

Kim caught his breath, moving closer to Tracy, who glimpsed first a lengthening shadow and then the man who made it—not so much of a giant after all, as he had thought when first listening to Kim, but big enough by any standard.

The man stopped and stood, uneasy, afraid, with the whisper again as his feet shuffled against the floor—about six-ten or eleven in height, Tracy thought, and above three hundred pounds in weight. His clothing consisted of worn denim pants, tight against massive thighs, and a tattered T-shirt. His head was round and a little small for the massive body, almost no neck at all, as Tracy had thought, the skull showing a bristle of dark hair. The face was flat and held a battered aspect, accentuated by thick ridges of scar tissue above eyes which blinked rapidly in a strange show of mingled fearfulness and pleading.

Danny Quon had started at his appearance. He said now, voice oddly gentle, "Hello, Aleki! Long time no see."

The small head ducked. The thin, high-pitched voice mumbled, "Hello, Lieutenant. I live here now."

Quon moved closer to Tracy and murmured in an undertone, "His name is Aleki Aponi, part Greek, part island blood. He was a fighter, some years back; they called him the Hilo Terror. Aleki campaigned some on the mainland but usually lost. He could hit but never acquired much boxing skill. A good heavyweight could jab him silly, then chop him down."



Tracy murmured in response, "Is he punch-drunk?"

"I suppose," Quon said, "though the poor guy didn't have much upstairs to begin with."

Ralph Cotter impatiently tapped his cane against the floor. It was a heavy wooden cane this time, Tracy noticed, not the rattan item he had displayed at the Shell Lounge earlier.

"This is the man you mentioned, Lieutenant," Cotter said. "I presume you are wondering what he is doing here. When Miss Destin and I arrived, we found him on hand. It seems he drifted onto the place and McLarnin, the caretaker, allowed him to stay, giving him food and a place to sleep in return for performing various chores."

"That was kind of McLarnin," Quon commented. "You had no objection to such an arrangement?"

"Not as long as the poor oaf caused no trouble," Cotter said. "Actually, he has proved slightly useful. There were a number of heavy trunks containing papers that I wanted brought down from the attic. McLarnin could not do it. He is too drunk much of the time to do anything. Aponi handled the job for me. He had been in here, with a confused statement of something happening outside, just before you knocked."

"I see," Quon said. "Now, about all that happened—"

"Yes. Miss Destin and I had an argument, climaxed when she ran out of the house. I knew from past experience she was liable to do something which might embarrass both herself and me. I called for her to stop, though not with any particular hope she would heed my demand. Aponi was here then, also. He ran after my cousin and brought her back."

Ralph Cotter glanced toward the stairs, then continued, "I certainly had no such direct action as that in mind and regret it happened, though it may have served a salutary purpose in that it apparently brought Miss Destin to her senses."

"Just what were you afraid she might do?" Quon asked.

The pale marble eyes narrowed. "Is it properly a concern of yours?" Cotter asked thinly, but shrugged and continued,

before Quon could answer, "I feared she might drink, indulge her temper and make a spectacle of herself as she did last night, which you may know about—"

"I had a report concerning it," Danny Quon said.

"She has a position to maintain," Cotter said. "Miss Destin does not always take that necessity seriously. I do."

Aponi still stood where he was, still uneasy, blinking with a wistful sort of earnestness. It was now apparent that he found the world baffling and inexplicable.

Quon said, "Was your quarrel about Mae Gamble?"

Cotter's cold features tightened. "That infernal woman! My cousin has the absurd notion we owe her something still, in spite of the fact she left us of her own volition, and with no warning. Yes, we quarreled about Mae Gamble."

"I am interested in finding her," Quon said.

"Indeed?" Cotter said. "Why?"

"Do you know where she is?" the lieutenant persisted.

"I do not! Nor do I care to know—!"

He broke off, looking again toward the staircase. Yolanda Destin had appeared there, coming down.

She was descending quickly, with the swirl of a diaphanous dark negligee. Under it, a nightgown was a pearl-like shimmer, suavely clinging, with discreet but emphatic revelation of the splendor of her body. She also wore mules, below a frothy lace hem. Then the woman stopped, halfway down, hand to a teakwood banister rail, obviously startled as she looked to the scene below.

Cotter spoke first, with a return of his exasperation, "What in heaven's name are you thinking of, to show yourself like that?"

"I—I didn't know anybody else was here," she said unsteadily.

"Well, get back—!"

Quon cut in on him. "I have several questions for Miss Destin, first." He paced across to the staircase, looked up at her, and continued, "I am a police officer, investigating an occurrence here tonight that involved you."

He was studying her sharply, Tracy noticed, and decided this must be the first time that Quon had seen

Yolanda Destin. The lieutenant quickly told her of Kim's report. He said, "Is that a correct summary of what happened?"

"Why, I suppose so," she replied. "I was too upset at the time to keep track of things. All I know is that that stupid lout hauled me back in here. I was pretty griped about it at the time, since I would probably have come back in myself a few minutes later. After all, where could I have gone? I don't have a car, it's difficult to get a taxi to come out here at night, as I discovered earlier in the evening, and I certainly can't see myself walking down to Honolulu, especially dressed as I was then."

"You don't wish to make a complaint?" Quon asked.

"About what?" Yolanda said. "And against whom? Aponi? He isn't to blame. Good heavens, Ralph and I just had a fight! We do that all the time. Why make such a fuss about it?"

Cotter cleared his throat. "I trust you are satisfied, Lieutenant, and that everything is now cleared up?"

"Not quite," Quon told him. "Something else happened."

He told then of Tracy Steele's encounter with Aleki Aponi.

Cotter listened. He yawned and glanced at a wrist-watch, then said, "I regret that Steele was assaulted."

His tone indicated he was not regretful at all. And he continued, "I do not attempt to condone what Aponi did, while emphasizing it was undertaken entirely of his own volition. I have not appointed him my watchdog. If Steele wishes to take action against him, let Steele do so."

Quon glanced to Tracy, who shook his head slightly, no.

Cotter went on, "And if there is any thought of seeking damages, resulting from the fact Aponi is, in a nebulous manner, employed here, I would call to your attention that this property is amply posted with 'Keep Out' signs and that a good case of trespass could be made against Steele."

"Do you want to sign a trespass complaint against him?" Quon asked.

Cotter's mouth began to work angrily. He leaned forward, hammering his cane's ferrule hard against the floor.

"Damn it, no! But I do want this arrogant intrusion to be ended, here and now! I have had a hard day and I want to go to bed. Will you kindly get the hell out of here and leave me alone?"

"A legitimate police inquiry does not constitute intrusion, and you have shown the only arrogance displayed tonight," Quon said coldly. "Yes. We'll go. But I have one more thing to do—"

He turned to the big man who was standing across the room, at the edge of shadows, and wagged an admonitory forefinger at him. "No more monkey business, Aleki!" Quon warned sternly. "You put those hands of yours on anybody else, I'll have to take you in!"

The man ducked his head, shivering with fright. "I sorry, Lieutenant," he whimpered. "I not want to hurt anybody."

Cotter said icily, "I trust you can find your way out."

Tracy exchanged a glance with Yolanda.

Then they left, Kim scurrying ahead.

Tracy and Danny Quon paced together along the walk between the coco palms. Tracy noticed Quon's car beyond the fence, its red blinker working. Perhaps a hundred feet from the house both stopped in unspoken agreement, shook out cigarettes and lighted up.

"Quite a pair, those two!" Quon commented. "I wonder what they're saying to each other now?"

Tracy was wondering the same thing. He was thinking of his impression of fear in the woman and wondering about that also.

"Poor Aleki!" Quon went on. "I knew him first as a big muscle-bound kid, heard later he made quite a bit of money fighting on the mainland but somebody else got it all. He drifted back to the islands dead broke about a year ago. I had lost track of him since. It looks like he holed up here with McLarnin. And it was kind of you not to take any action against him, Tracy. If you had, he might have had to face a felonious assault rap."

"I thought of that, since the law regards a fighter's fists as deadly weapons," Tracy said. "A headache isn't reason enough to hang several years in prison on him."

Quon blew smoke then and studied the house. "With all

of my years in the department, this is the first time I have ever been in there," he remarked. "I knew Cotter by sight when he lived here before, and also Mrs. Destin, the girl's mother, who of course owned everything. Her husband died shortly after Yolanda was born. It was said she took his death very hard. Maybe that was the reason why she suddenly pulled up roots here and left, allowing the place to degenerate as it has. I remember there was some speculation about that at the time, but I can't recall anybody coming closer to an answer than that."

Tracy said. "There is an interesting question that I wish now you had asked while we were in there—why did Cotter and Yolanda come back?"

Quon snorted. "He probably would have replied that it was none of my damned business—and he would have been right! Maybe there will be an opportunity for you to ask her."

"Maybe," Tracy agreed. "There are several questions I would like to ask—among them, whether my feeling that she is very afraid of something is correct, and if so, the reason for it."

"All I want to know is where Mae Gamble is!" Quon said.

They continued on, reached the fence, worked their way along it to the unlocked gate and through that to the road. Kim was already in Tracy's car, with the motor turning over, the lights on. And Quon suddenly chuckled, with those lights on them.

"Tracy, you look as though you had run into several assorted doors," he said. "You've got two of the blackest eyes I ever saw!"

In the house, Cotter sat forward with his head tilted to one side, listening. As he heard the two cars on the road start up and move off, he exhaled and settled back, relaxing.

He pointed his cane at Aleki Aponi. "You, get to your kennel or wherever it is that you stay. Go!"

The big man gulped in relief at being dismissed, bobbed

his head, turned and went hurriedly away, a door closing behind him as he disappeared.

Yolanda Destin still stood on the stairs.

Cotter said, "You played it smart, responding to that policeman as you did. Perhaps you are coming to your senses. It may be you have realized that if you persisted in the dangerous scheme on which you had embarked, I might remember a certain happening and talk about it."

She started. A hand lifted uncertainly. It clutched a fold of silk at her breast.

"Do you want me to remember?" Cotter purred. "Do you want me to talk?"

"No!" she gasped, voice half-strangled. Her dark eyes were dilated in fear. She shivered and started to turn as though to flee up the stairs, but stopped as he spoke again.

"You will behave yourself, then," Cotter said. "You will try making no more moves against me. Do you understand?"

The hand at her breast clutched harder. Her lips moved but no sound came.

"Answer me!" he snapped.

"Yes," she whispered. "I understand."

"Good." He suddenly pushed himself up from the chair, weight on his right foot, left foot thrust stiffly out at an angle, both hands resting on the cane. "And there will be no more scenes that might call attention to both of us. For if you do not behave—if you continue to conspire against me—"

He turned and slashed with the cane at the armchair. The heavy wood bit into old cracked leather with a wicked explosive sound, and the leather split open.

Cotter looked up to her, the cane poised as though to slash anew. "That is what can happen to you if you ever try anything against me again," he warned bitingly.

She whispered, "Is it what happened to—to—?"

He laughed harshly in response. "I thought that was what you were probably guessing," Ralph Cotter said. "Mae Gamble must have planted it in your head before she left. No! It is not what happened."

"You are lying to me," the woman said.

"Am I? Well, there is the telephone." He pointed to it on a table across the room. "Call the police back. Tell them in specific terms just what it is that you guessed happened. When you are finished I shall talk also—not a wild guess, but the truth, which I can prove. You keep trying to forget. I must continually remind you it is the truth, and what it can do to you if I tell it. Now, go ahead. Call!"

Features pinched, pale, but with a sudden show of resolution, she shook her head. "No. I won't talk. Neither will you, because you can't, any more than I can. Both of us have too much to lose. We have to keep silent. And you are going to quit tormenting me, because if you don't something else is liable to happen, and then it will all come out anyway."

She paused, but only to draw a quick breath, hurrying on before he could speak. "You can make me stay here, make me remember, and I'll tell Tracy Steele to stop looking for Mae, as you want me to, but I won't take any more. It is why I started to come downstairs, to tell you that. Do you hear me? I am not going to take any more!"

She whirled about and ran up the stairs, a hurried retreating rush which carried her from sight.

Ralph Cotter's stiffly outthrust left leg was quivering. He bent to rub it, the shriveled broomstick leg that he hated so much. It was hate he had lived with a long while, though; he could stand it, and had done so through the years save for one occasion when wicked, derisive laughter at his expense had seared to the depths of his soul. He shivered, remembering that laughter, then determinedly put it out of his mind. He could go mad, Cotter feared, if he did not. He thought of the events of the evening.

There was only contempt in him for the swarthy-faced cop and for Tracy Steele. They had learned nothing; they would learn nothing.

As for the woman upstairs, perhaps he would have to grant her some grudging leeway, as she had demanded, for the balance of their stay here, which would not be long. But, after that . . . He cut viciously at the armchair again, with the thought that she would pay for her defiance. She would pay to the hilt.

## Six

Tracy Steele and Tom Lopaka sat at their desks the following morning, both hard at work, Tom frowning over a revision of the Jolo Company contract, Tracy preparing a proposal for the prospective client with whom he had lunched yesterday.

Tom had said, upon hearing the previous night's events, "When things happen, you always seem to be the one who is on hand!"

"I would gladly have traded places with you, Kamaki, at the moment when Aleki Aponi started to bounce me around," Tracy had assured him.

A murmur of voices came from the other room. Moke had stayed on to instruct the new receptionist in her duties.

The reports of the night operatives looking for Mae Gamble were in. Both were negative. Two day men were now on the job.

A call at nine o'clock had reported that the operation on Jack Burrell at Aiea Naval Hospital had been completed. The surgeons, while hopeful, were not yet certain of its outcome.

Moke came in, accompanied by the receptionist, a vividly pretty young woman of about twenty, a living example of the exotic mingling of the races in Hawaii. Her name was Irene Ling. She, like her predecessors, was from the hotel secretarial pool.

They approved of Irene Ling. Tracy hoped they could hold on to her for a while. But Tom remarked, grinning, after Moke escorted her out again, "She's mighty pretty.



I have a feeling we'll be buying another wedding present soon!"

"And something for a baby shower thereafter," Tracy agreed. Cricket, who loved both weddings and baby showers, would see to that.

He settled himself determinedly to working out the proposal for what could become a substantial new account for the firm.

His phone rang. Greg MacKenzie said in Tracy's ear, "No remarks about the sunshine at Waikiki today, please. San Francisco is fogged in, drat it. Ready for my report?"

"Just a second, Greg," Tracy said, with a nod to Tom Lopaka, who scooped up his phone, punched a button and was on the line also.

"The Destins, first," Greg began. "They arrived from Hawaii a dozen years ago and bought a big house at Sea Cliff, close to the Golden Gate Bridge. That is, the mother did, with her nephew, a fellow named Cotter who seemed to manage her affairs. Mrs. Destin apparently was a recluse. Hardly anybody ever had a glimpse of her."

"What about the daughter?" Tracy asked.

"Nobody ever saw much of her either. First, she was away at school. More recently she seems to have just been away a good deal of the time, period," Greg replied. "An odd thing about those people, I checked the morgues of all the papers and couldn't turn up a picture of any of them. No news items worth mentioning either, except that Mrs. Destin died seven months ago. Her will is still in probate. The daughter gets everything and according to all estimates it is quite a bundle. Cotter still appears to be in control though."

He paused a moment before continuing, "I had a chat with Hattie Werbler, the local Blue Book specialist who knows the identities of the skeletons in every closet in San Francisco. Hattie thinks that Mrs. Destin, instead of being a recluse, was actually hiding from something behind drawn curtains at the Sea Cliff house."

"Something—?" Tom put in.

"Hattie couldn't answer that question, Kanaka," Greg responded, "but feels certain she is right. Also, she told me

the daughter has been involved in several spots of trouble."

"What kind of trouble, Greg?" Tracy asked.

"Wild driving, a couple of smash-ups, including one near brush with a manslaughter rap which was evaded when the victim recovered, to collect a sizeable out-of-court settlement from the Destin estate. In addition, Hattie reported at least one incident involving sleeping pills."

Tracy's brows lifted. "A suicide try?" he asked.

"The police thought so," Greg replied. "Now, here is the rest of what I picked up. A party of three left San Francisco two months ago, via United Air to New York and Pan-American on to London. It apparently was to be a leisurely trip around the world, since there were further air bookings to Rome, Cairo and Karachi. Cotter bought the tickets. The other two were women. I don't have their names yet. Presumably the Destin girl was one, and I suppose it figures that the Mae Gamble mentioned yesterday was the other. I'll pin it down for certain today. . . . Ready now for what I have managed to learn about Jack Burrell?"

"Shoot," Tracy said.

"His duty station was Eleventh Naval District, San Diego," Greg said. "I tapped several contacts there by phone and got the word that the clamps are on very tight about him, with orders to everybody to do no talking. However, I—ah—still managed to learn a little. Two nights ago about seven, a phone call was relayed from district headquarters to bachelor officers' quarters at the destroyer base, where he had a room. Burrell was seen taking the call on a hall phone. He reacted as though somebody had slugged him in the stomach, sick-looking, wild, almost irrational. He tramped up and down in his room for a while—a guy with a room alongside him heard that—then made a call of his own and suddenly took off. It was the last anybody in San Diego saw of him."

Tom said, "Anything more?"

"One additional item," Greg replied. "He was traced to Los Angeles where he spent the night at a hotel. Next morning he was on the early flight to Honolulu."

Silence spanned the two thousand miles of ocean between Waikiki and the Golden Gate for a long moment,

as Tracy and Tom Lopaka exchanged a glance, each considering what they had heard, each arriving at the same quick conclusion.

"Hey?" Greg said. "What now? More digging, or can I come home tomorrow? I'm tying up all the loose ends on the Diamond Head Insurance case this afternoon and evening."

"Find out what else you can on that around-the-world trip by Cotter and the women," Tracy decided. "Then we'll see you at lunch tomorrow."

"Right," Greg said. "I'll be expecting steel guitars, hula girls, orchid leis and Cricket, all dewy-eyed, ready with a welcome home kiss for me. Aloha nui loa!"

Tracy slowly hung up. He glanced to Tom. "Your feeling last night that we had reached some wrong conclusion about Burrell was right," he remarked. "I took a flying jump in the wrong direction, and you and Danny Quon went right along with me."

"Could be," Tom agreed. "But let's make a try at confirming it before we make a jump in the other direction."

He picked up his phone again, dialed, spoke briefly, listened, then put it down and nodded to Tracy, who was waiting somewhat tautly.

"On the nose," Tom said. "The phone company reports somebody made a call to San Diego from our number two days ago, close to five o'clock in the afternoon, seven o'clock there."

Tracy leaned back, lacing fingers behind his head, wincing slightly; the ache there still persisted. He looked at the ceiling, thinking aloud, "If I had thought twice, it just didn't figure that Burrell, whom I knew only slightly, with no contacts between us since our previous meeting, should suddenly come rushing here to see me. He didn't. Mae Gamble called him. She was the one he was in a tearing hurry to meet... in our office. This was where she told him to come."

"What she had to say must have hit him like a lightning bolt," Tom commented. "That second call Burrell made was probably to check on how soon he could get to the islands, and the reply was that he couldn't leave before the

following morning. So he went up to Los Angeles, stayed the night and took the morning flight west."

"In an AWOL status by then," Tracy said, "and obviously that didn't matter to him. Why? What was driving him so hard that nothing mattered except to get to Honolulu at once?"

"I can suggest two possibilities—money or a woman," Tom Lopaka said. "Maybe the two in combination, since we have that in this particular case."

"Yolanda Destin?" Tracy said. "But if she is to be believed, Yolanda couldn't have been involved with Burrell. She told me that she didn't know the man when she saw him here."

"She wouldn't necessarily have to know him if she was the target for blackmail," Tom pointed out.

"The target of a scheme being operated by Mae Gamble, with Burrell a part of it?" Tracy said. "I still can't buy that."

"Not even if there was a possibility of a whopping big payoff?"

"Tom, I don't think any payoff could be big enough to persuade him, a career Naval officer, to buy a sure court-martial and ruin," Tracy said. "He must have known he couldn't get away with going AWOL, that he could stay free for only hours before he was traced and picked up. Burrell must have been willing to accept that, but he had to get here and accomplish something before it happened. What was that something?"

Tom smiled wryly. "I'm fresh out of answers. But there are two people who can supply all of them."

"Yes. Burrell and Mae Gamble. It doesn't seem likely we can get at Burrell soon. So—"

They studied each other, then glanced to the respective tasks before them.

Tom closed the Jolo file. "I've had a feeling the Destin-Gamble-Burrell business was going to suck us in," he commented.

"So did I," Tracy said.

"I'll go out on the town, check first with the men we've got working, then see if I can find Mae's trail," Tom said.

"Danny Quon no doubt has made a pretty thorough sweep, but I might get lucky and discover something he has missed. What angle will you take, Tracy?"

"I think I'll try back-tracking on Burrell," Tracy answered.

Tom pushed back his chair and started to rise, but Tracy continued to sit where he was, staring abstractedly at nothing. Tom hesitated. He said, "Something nagging at you?"

"Yes," Tracy replied. "I keep thinking of the talk that some pilikia drove the Destins away from Hawaii; now Greg has heard it in San Francisco. Tom, fill me in on that family, all of them."

"Sure," Tom agreed, settling again. "Let's see, the first of the line was old Roger Destin, who came to the islands about 1885 and built the big house. He already had money—made it on the China Coast and in Malaya in various unsavory ways, stories have it, which made him somewhat declass   in island society. Not that he seemed to mind. He was married, a woman with Spanish blood. The stories say both were pretty wild and fiery people.

"The second in line was their only son, Seth, who was completely unlike them, a hard worker and estate builder, rather puritanical. He really piled up the fortune—was in everything, the China trade, shipping, sugar, San Francisco real estate; he spent as much time on the mainland as he did here. He married and also had one son, Arthur."

"That was Yolanda's father?" Tracy interjected.

"Right. Arthur didn't have a chance to accomplish much of anything. He died shortly after Yolanda was born, with Mrs. Destin going into prolonged mourning for him."

"How does Cotter fit into the family tree?"

"He is a nephew of Mrs. Destin, the son of her only sister, long deceased. I don't know any more about him." And Tom added, with a dry smile, "We didn't exactly move in the same social circles when he was living at Nuuanu. Anything more I can offer?"

Tom had the facts concerning every notable family at his fingertips. He could name his own Hawaiian ancestors for many generations into the past.

"Do you know anything about the pilikia?" Tracy asked.

"Only the rumors that some kind of trouble made them pack up and leave in a sudden hurry, closing that house up tight," Tom replied. "I've also heard Mrs. Destin just couldn't stand Honolulu and the house because both held too many reminders of her husband."

But Yolanda must have been in her early teens when they had gone away, Tracy thought. It didn't seem to figure that Mrs. Destin would have waited more than a decade to find Honolulu unbearable.

He wondered if Yolanda had inherited her dark hair and eyes, her temper, from her great-grandmother.

"There is supposed to be a rather notable portrait of old Roger in that house," Tom said. "Maybe you saw it?"

Tracy nodded.

Moke came in, ready at last to knock off for the day. "The hotel housekeeper just called to report your step-ladder has been found, Mr. Steele," he reported. "It was in the corridor that has the ramp leading down to the garage, at the far end of the lobby. She'll have it returned to your service porch."

Cricket was busy in her shop, waiting on two matronly ladies who were making a leisurely selection of color slides. Tracy leaned against a counter, waiting, with the thought that his head felt as though it was packed with dirty cobwebs.

Cricket came at last to join him. "You need two eye-patches today," she remarked, looking him over. "I'll lead you around by the hand if you want to put them on."

"In my feeble condition, that is a very attractive offer," Tracy said. "I'll give it due consideration, lover."

Then he got down to business. "Cricket, do you have pics on yesterday's 11 a.m. flight from the mainland?"

"Of course," she replied. "Luana has them in the back room."

Luana Miller was Cricket's shop assistant.

Cricket Blake had gotten her start in the islands with a camera, snapping shots of arrivals at the airport and docks,

then selling prints. She no longer had time for such activity and hired others to do the camera work for her. It was a lucrative source of income.

"I'd like a look at the whole set," Tracy said. "Can do?"

"All right," she agreed. "They're all in film strips. We order enlargements only on the ones that are purchased. Do you want to see them right now?"

She wore a frilly pinafore today, with her hair loose and shining. Cricket looked very young, sweetly pretty.

He considered, and shook his head. "I've some other things to do. Have Luana drop them off at my desk, please."

He started toward the door. Cricket said quickly, "I could take a little time off this afternoon."

It was another oblique plea for him to go surfing with her.

"If I can make it, I'll let you know," Tracy said.

Tracy Steele was away from the office until almost three. Coming back, with a frustrating sense of not having accomplished anything, he noticed Kim sitting at the wheel of his cab at the curb, head tilted forward and hat down, apparently dozing. But Kim shifted his head and a bright eye fixed on Tracy. He said, "Hello, dere!"

"Hello, Aikane," Tracy said. "Do you have anything for me?"

Kim shrugged, yawned and shook his head, all at the same time. "Nobody seem to know anything about Destin pilikia." Then, as though belatedly remembering, he added, "Lady come by while ago, say if I see you I might mention she down on beach. So I mention it."

Tracy said, "Lady—?"

"Mis' Destin," Kim said. He whistled softly in tribute. "Auwe! She sure pretty in bathing suit!"

Then he opened one of his hands, displaying the corner of a bill. "Generous, too."

"You can say that again," Tracy agreed. "After such a tip, I would think you would have knocked off for the day."

"No, I stick around. Maybe you need me."

"I might at that." Tracy said.

He went into the office. Irene Ling reported no calls of consequence. Tom Lopaka had not yet returned.

Tracy continued on to his apartment. He put on bathing trunks, went out through the rear and onto the beach.

The day was sheer perfection, with a hot bright sun but a cooling breeze. Diamond Head was a great gray-green wedge against a cloudless sky that was so deep a blue it almost hurt the eyes.

Big combers thundered smokily in. The ocean, blue also, dimpled by whitecaps as far as one could see to a sharply incised horizon, rolled off toward China. The beach was crowded, and the water as well—with swimmers, beach-boys, catamarans, outriggers, sailboats, paddleboards, surfers. There was music, and shouting, and laughter. It was a scene of which Tracy Steele never tired.

Yolanda Destin was sitting alone, on the segment of beach reserved for Hawaiian Village guests. She had a blanket, an umbrella, a beach coat; her bathing suit was creamy white, cut with a deep V in back, a modified ballet-skirt effect at her hips. She was slowly rubbing sun-tan oil on golden-tinted thighs, glanced to Tracy and nodded without speaking, then returned her gaze to the ocean.

He sat down beside her.

Yolanda said, "I was just thinking about how I used to come here years ago. Well, a little south of here; it was before the Hawaiian Village was built. We would come down in the afternoon, Casey driving. That was Casey Maddern, our chauffeur. My mother never got out of the car. She didn't like the water. Milliama was usually with us. She had been my nurse and stayed on as mother's personal maid. Sometimes Manolo would be along also, to fetch and carry. His last name was Fabregas. I think he was Filipino, mostly."

Her hair was a dark cloud, stirred by a rising breeze. She was watching him from the corner of one eye, Tracy noticed. To gauge the effect of her words on him? He wondered.

"I never liked Manolo," Yolanda continued. "In fact, at times I hated him. He had worked on a plantation my



father owned. He did odd jobs and took care of my pony. He was mean to Buttons, on the sly." She fell silent, then went on. "I'm not trespassing on the beach, in case you're wondering. We stayed at a lanai suite here for two nights after arriving and are still paying rent on it. I didn't use it though, since Ralph has the key, but took a cabana. Also, I bought all of these things in a hotel shop."

She laughed briefly. "Ralph and I have agreed on a truce. He's to work on his book, and I'm to come and go without any further fights. So I have rented a car of my own, and I want to see as little of that depressing house as I can."

Tracy said, "Book—?"

"That's why we're here," Yolanda said. "Ralph is writing a biography of my great-grandfather, Roger Destin. He has been digging up material about him all around the world. Honolulu is our last stop. Roger insisted on staying at the house so he could go through the papers stored in the attic there."

She corked the bottle of sun-tan oil and put it aside. "I think I'd like to go into the water now."

"You have a beautiful tan," Tracy said.

"I'm surprised it has lasted so long," Yolanda said. "I acquired most of it in Florida last winter and spring, up until the time we started on the trip."

She reached for her cap and stood up. "Is Hawaiian Eye still trying to find Mae for me, Tracy?"

"Of course, but with no result so far," he replied.

Yolanda said, "I agree with Ralph now that it isn't really any of my business. If Mae should need help when she turns up I'll be glad to offer it, but I don't want you hunting her any longer."

Tracy wished it might be that easy to discontinue the search. But it had to go on. Hawaiian Eye itself was involved; Mae Gamble had been its employee, and Jack Burrell had been assaulted on its premises.

Yolanda tucked dark strands of hair under her cap, nibbling now at her lip; she looked to him with some embarrassment. "There is one thing more. I behaved very fool-

ishly night before last. I treated someone badly and know you must have heard about it—”

He nodded. And Yolanda hurried on, “I want to make up for that. There must be an apology, of course. And should I do more? Will money help? I would be willing to give any amount.”

“I think an apology will be enough,” Tracy told her.

She showed a tremulous smile of great relief. “I have a wicked temper that gets out of hand at times but I’m not a wicked person, really, and have been terribly afraid you might think I was. The chief reason I wanted to see you this afternoon was to tell you how much I want to set things right.”

“I hope it wasn’t the only reason you wanted to see me,” Tracy said.

Her smile altered slightly. It became shy, with a hint of promissive warmth. Yet at the same time Tracy had a sense of guarded watchfulness deep in her eyes.

“No. It wasn’t the only reason,” Yolanda murmured.

They went into the surf. It was known as King’s Surf along here, contrasted with Queen’s Surf farther south. The water was neither too warm nor too cold—bracing, rather, and Tracy felt the cobwebs swept from his head.

He introduced her to surfing, using a wide board, holding her from behind, picking the lesser waves. She still fell off, in the manner of beginners, laughing as he pulled her from the water.

“I always wanted to try surfing,” Yolanda said. “And I never had a chance before. Mother would never agree to let me do it.”

They returned to the sand and towed themselves. Tracy discovered in some surprise that it was suddenly late, with a magnificent island sunset on display, all crimson and gold and purple, as though arranged for their special benefit.

“I must go in,” Yolanda said.

“I’ll have a boy take this stuff to your cabana,” Tracy said.

She studied him gravely. "Will I be seeing you again soon?"

"In about an hour, if that isn't too soon—if you'll have dinner with me," Tracy said, smiling. The memory of his hands on her supple body was very pleasant.

She nodded. "In about an hour."

Yolanda was abruptly close to him, the clean, fresh tang of her like a breeze from the ocean. Her head tilted up. Her eyes were almost closed.

"This has all been so wonderful!" she breathed.

He did not know whether there was further movement on her part, or from himself, and regarded this as immaterial. Her lips touched his, shyly for a moment, then warmly, ardently, clinging, before she wrenched herself away and turned and ran across the beach toward the hotel.

Tracy looked after her, trying to sort out the confusing rush of emotions that he felt.

He heard his name called sharply, and looked around. He saw first Danny Quon, who had come onto the beach. Then, beyond Quon, he glimpsed Cricket. She was looking toward him, her features expressionless.

Cricket wheeled and left, almost running. Tracy sighed. He had forgotten his promise to let her know if they could spend some time together on the beach this afternoon.

Then he moved to join Danny Quon, who looked tired and depressed, but with his jaw slanted forward and grimly set. If Quon had seen the kiss he made no mention of it.

Instead, "It's all in our laps now, Tracy," he said. "Burrell didn't make it; there was an embolism, and he died a short while ago without regaining consciousness."

So it had become a case of murder, with Hawaiian Eye completely involved. Everything else must be set aside, forgotten, all of the energies of the firm must be concentrated on it until the answers were found and the deadly puzzle was wholly explained.

## Seven

The luau torches spread a golden wash of light over the patio pool. Captain Elias Ziffren eyed the pool grimly, paced toward it, then turned and came back, head bent, hands clasped behind his back, speaking his strained and bewildered thoughts aloud.

"The thing Burrell did could have had endless ramifications," he said. "He was cleared to all but the top level of security, which meant that all secret and confidential documents in Eleventh Naval District files at San Diego had to be checked and double-checked to make sure none was missing. Every code had to be checked. One missing cipher strip would mean that an entire code would have to be junked and replaced for the whole Navy, at a fantastic cost."

Tom Lopaka and Danny Quon, standing together, nodded their understanding. The time was nearing nine. This conference had been going on for nearly two hours, and all of them knew they had run in circles, accomplishing nothing.

Tracy was at his desk, using a large magnifying glass as he examined the film-strips Cricket had sent along.

"Nothing has been found out of order," Ziffren continued. "So apparently whatever he was up to had nothing to do with the Navy. But—did Burrell know he was going to cause that much trouble? He must have known. The man had an excellent record. He was due for promotion soon and sea duty, was the kind of officer being tabbed for

eventual high command. And he threw all of that over! Why?"

They had no answer for him. But Tom said, "Captain, Tracy had a thought about that, to the effect Burrell must have known he could not remain free for very long, probably only hours after arriving in Honolulu, that he hoped to accomplish something before then, not particularly caring what happened to him afterward. In such an event, he probably felt the Navy would not be put to all of this trouble on his account."

"I hope you're right," Ziffren said heavily.

Danny Quon stirred. "Captain, has your check of his background uncovered anything at all that might help us?"

Ziffren hunched his shoulders and spread his hands. "Nothing! He spent approximately a year on duty at San Francisco, then was ordered to San Diego a short time ago. His record was clean—no excessive debts, no liquor or known woman trouble, the usual causes which pop up when a man suddenly goes haywire. And all of his recent psychiatric and physical tests were passed with high marks."

Tracy leaned back in his chair. "I've found another one," he announced.

The three moved around the desk to take turns with the magnifying glass, leaning down to examine one of the minuscule photographs on the film-strip. It was the third Tracy had found which included Jack Burrell. He was striding toward the camera from the plane ramp. His jaw was set hard, his mouth was tight, and his features were like something carved from granite. He had the look of one whose every nerve was stretched to the breaking point.

"That lad was on fire inside," Quon muttered.

Stepping back from the desk, he continued, "I checked on his plane. It was held aloft in a circling pattern because of an Air France jet from Tahiti which was in some sort of trouble and which they wanted down first, so that arrival of the Los Angeles flight was delayed nearly forty minutes. Counting delay at the baggage counter, finding a cab and bucking the usual traffic on the way from the airport, Burrell couldn't have walked in here before some time past one o'clock."

"Maybe a little earlier," Tracy said. "We checked on the taxi he used. The driver said Burrell had him driving like a maniac, with promise of a double fare for extra speed."

"Well, whenever it happened he arrived and found nobody on hand, according to Miss Destin's statement," Quon said. "What about your receptionist's lunch schedule?"

"Eleven-thirty to twelve-fifteen. During that time a relief girl from the secretarial pool takes over," Tracy replied. "The receptionist's desk is supposed to be covered at all times."

"Where do your girls do their nose-powdering?" Quon asked.

"It's the door to your right, as you come in from the street."

"So maybe Mae Gamble was in there when Burrell arrived," Quon said. "Then he appeared and they met. She had sent for him, he rushed here, and at one or a little past they faced each other. Approximately an hour later he had been slugged and was in the pool, and now he is dead. That woman knows the whole story. She must know it! And the problem still is to find her."

He rubbed his chin fretfully. The Honolulu Police Department was going all out in the effort to locate Mae Gamble. It angered Danny Quon that not one trace of her had been uncovered.

He continued. "Maybe it's significant, maybe not, but I haven't turned up George LaDew for a heart-to-heart chat, either. However, there are a lot of joints in this town yet to be investigated. He ought to be found before very long."

Ziffren frowned. "One thing I find rather hard to understand is that an employee of this firm was living in what I understand is not much more than a flophouse, the Pacific Gem Hotel," he remarked.

Tom answered him, "She stated, when giving me her address, that she would be at the Pacific Gem only temporarily, that she was waiting for an apartment which she would occupy in about another week. I assumed she had

just arrived in town and had picked a cheap place at random."

"Did she ask for an advance, Tom?" Tracy asked.

"Yes. Fifty bucks. I gave it to her," Tom replied.

It had probably gone for liquor for George LaDew, Tracy thought.

He said, "Danny, you may have thought of this already, but if not, how about a check to learn whether anybody else, other than Burrell and Miss Destin, entered our office between one and two yesterday afternoon?"

"I've already thought of it," Quon growled. "Results negative, so far."

Tracy and Tom exchanged a glance, with an unspoken agreement that they would make a check of their own also.

Ziffren picked up copies of the *Star-Bulletin* and *Advertiser* from Tracy's desk and glanced at them. "I want to thank you for helping to play down the story about Burrell, Lieutenant," he said.

"What the papers have to say tomorrow may be different," Quon told him. "I'm afraid we can't keep this matter under wraps any longer. But maybe we'll get a break before then."

Ziffren nodded heavily, then glanced at his watch. "I must be going along. Call on me for any help I can offer."

Moke came in, put a slip of paper on Tracy's desk and returned to the reception room. Tracy glanced to the slip, read its message and put it in his pocket.

"Poor Burrell," Ziffren muttered. "God rest him, and put his killer in our hands!"

Farewells were spoken. Ziffren and Quon left together. Tom went to the office's small private bar, already open—refreshments had been offered, earlier, but no one had been in the mood for them—and said, "I feel the need for a drink now and a belated steak. How about you, Tracy?"

Looking down at the film-strips, Tracy muttered, "I hoped we might turn up something in these pics that would give us a lead. But it looks as though we've drawn a blank."

Then, stretching, he continued, "No, thanks, Tom. I

have to go out for a little while. See you later."

"Sure," Tom Lopaka said, measuring a jigger of bourbon.

There was a coolness in the air. Rain had fallen briefly a little earlier, like the languorous swish of a veil. The trade wind was rioting among monkeypod trees and rustling palm fronds. A distant sighing of soft music came from the Tapa Room Supper Club. Torches glittered beyond the surf, where outriggers danced on the dark water, with echoes of distant laughter.

Yolanda Destin stood on a crushed-shell path between banks of flowers, rioting hibiscus and bougainvillea, snowy gardenias, ginger blossoms, orchids that were still rain-washed and like waxen stars in a reflected shimmer of light from the hotel. A sense-stirring, almost intoxicating fragrance seemed to swirl about her. She was looking toward the crimson glitter of a fire, intermittently visible through crowding foliage, not very far away. There were torches yonder also, and music, and gay bursts of exclaiming voices.

Turning to Tracy Steele with a smile as he approached, she said, "It's a luau, there at the fire. I've been watching and listening. They seem to be having a wonderful time."

"We can join them, if you wish," he said.

"No. I'd rather just be with you for a bit."

She had changed to a dress that was pale lime in color, with twisted shoulder-straps that were like small ropes. The neckline plunged daringly, offering more than a hint of her full breasts. Tracy had seen a dress like it on display in one of the hotel shop windows and had a hunch she had bought it there, as she had bought her beach gear. With calculation of its effect on him? If so, he thought, the effect had been achieved.

Taking his arm, she continued, "I hope it wasn't forward of me to send that note, asking you to come here if you could."

"Not at all," he replied. "I'll apologize again for having to break our date. I hope you made out all right?"

"Oh, yes. I changed at the cabana and had a leisurely



dinner in the Ale Ale Kai dining room. I suppose I'm pronouncing the words wrong. I could speak Hawaiian before I knew English, but one forgets. Then I went to the Shell Bar for a while. I saw the girl who sings there. We didn't speak but it is obvious she has a very poor opinion of me. I would be the last to say she doesn't have ample reason. Should I apologize to her also?"

"Let me think about that," Tracy said. The thought of another encounter between Yolanda and Cricket was a little intimidating.

They strolled slowly along the path. He studied her appraisingly, the sleek shimmer of her dark hair, the curve of her chin, the richness of her mouth, sensing a hidden enigma in this woman, a guarded watchfulness. She was afraid; he could feel it in a slight trembling of her fingers.

Perhaps he would soon learn why she was afraid. Yolanda had not sent for him only to take this walk, Tracy thought. He hoped she was almost at the point of opening up.

He said lightly, "I hope I may have a rain-check on the dinner date."

"Of course," she agreed. "Tomorrow night, if you like. That is, if nothing happens before then."

"What could happen?"

"So many things, perhaps," Yolanda said, low-voiced.

The path came to a dead end. They stopped, walled in on three sides by lush greenery. It was an area where visitors thronged during the day, busy with their cameras. At this hour it was deserted and there was sudden deep quiet. They could no longer hear the happy sounds of the luau.

Yolanda turned to face him. Both of her hands reached to his arms, moving there, lightly gripping, then her grasp became stronger.

"Tracy, I need someone to help me," she said.

"Hawaiian Eye is at your service," he murmured.

"Don't put it that way! I said someone. You."

They were very close. Her face tilted up to him with intensity in a searching gaze, something sensed rather than wholly visible in the dark where they stood.

"I'm ready to help," he told her. "You must admit, though, that you haven't given me very much to go on so far."

"I know." She came even closer, cheek turned, resting against his chest, and shivered briefly. "But I can't tell you any more."

Her hair brushed his cheek silkily. He was strongly aware of the sandalwood scent, of velvet pressure from her body. "Yolanda, why can't you tell me?"

"Don't ask me that!"

Her head lifted again. Her lips covered his. They were warm, very sweet, fully his for the taking.

An arm coiled about his neck. "Accept me on faith, Tracy—and help me!" she breathed.

He held her lightly, thinking of the ardent caress, of another which was now offered.

At any other time he would thoroughly have enjoyed this byplay, would gladly have entered into it. Love could happen. Perhaps it might happen to the two of them. The cards just might fall that way.

But, he reminded himself, this was no light, pleasant game they were playing. Something deadly was involved, demanding first consideration, and Yolanda Destin, he was thoroughly convinced, could provide the answers or at least the key which would disclose them.

Tracy avoided her second kiss. "You can have all of the help I can offer, Yolanda, and on faith if it has to be that way. But it would help immeasurably if you would tell me a few things—where Mae Gamble might be, for instance."

"But I haven't the slightest idea!" she cried. "If I did have, I wouldn't have come to you."

"Tell me more about her, then."

"Well, we weren't very close. Actually, I had only several brief contacts with her before we took the trip. Mae was a sort of companion to my mother for about a year before her death, and I wasn't home very often during that time. She also did secretarial work for Ralph."

"She wasn't your secretary, then, as you said before?"

"No. Mae was really along to keep track of papers for

Ralph and to type up his notes. He was quite angry when she left us."

The wind had ebbed, in its occasional fashion. Tracy still held her.

Yolanda continued, "It was Mae who mentioned to me she had had trouble with several men. Tracy, that man I saw in your office might have been involved with her. Or perhaps you have already asked him—?"

He said, "You haven't read today's newspapers?"

"Why, no. Was there something in them I should have seen?"

Yes. And the time had come, Tracy thought, to tell her what it was, to shock Yolanda into admitting what she had been avoiding, that Mae Gamble had been attempting to blackmail her, and why.

But before he could speak, she hurried on, "I almost forgot; there is one thing I must tell you right now about that trip. I don't know why I didn't think of mentioning it sooner—"

He interrupted her, hand lightly covering her mouth. He breathed, "Be quiet!"

Someone had moved in the thick greenery nearby, the furtive shift of a heavy body there. Tracy listened hard. He heard it again, together with the tread of a heavy step, a hiss of sharply indrawn breath. The woman stiffened. She had heard it also.

He whispered to Yolanda, "Start back along the path. It may be a prowler, maybe only someone coming from the beach. I'll check and find out."

Then he left her, plunging into the foliage, still heavy with moisture from the rain, driving directly toward whoever it was stalking them.

He took no more than two driving paces before noise and conflict erupted before him, with a snarl of startled profanity, a thrashing about in the dark undergrowth, the sharp *splat!* of a fist chunking against bone, followed by an angry howl and then pounding footsteps, someone running away, crashing off heedlessly toward the beach.

Tracy came to a stop, startled and puzzled. Someone else came pushing toward him. He shifted position alertly,

weight balanced on the balls of his feet, hands ready.

Tom Lopaka chuckled, appearing before him, pushing aside a trailing vinelike tendril, that was spangled with orchids. "It's only me, Tracy. Somebody was apparently after your hide."

Tracy grunted, relaxing. "It sounded as though you put other ideas in his head," he remarked.

"I put my fist against it. With pleasure."

"Any idea who he was?"

"Too dark even to get a look at him," Tom said. "Somebody fairly beefy; I spotted him some minutes ago, sneaking along from the direction of the beach. He didn't lay a hand on me, but I did get his breath in my face—one hundred proof; it alone nearly knocked me over. Oh, I also grabbed at him, and came up with something."

Tracy snapped his cigarette lighter and saw a ragged piece of red cloth.

"Does it mean anything?" Tom asked.

"I think you tangled with George LaDew, who probably had a befuddled notion of paying me back for yesterday evening at the Pacific Gem," Tracy said.

For a moment there had been the hope that the skulker in the dark might furnish a lead to Mae Gamble. But it seemed unlikely that LaDew, probably drunk and vengefully on the prowl, could furnish any further answers.

Then Tracy remembered Yolanda Destin. "I've got to run, Tom."

"Sure," Tom said. "I'll call headquarters and pass the word that LaDew is on the beach. Maybe a patrol car can pick him up."

The path was empty. Tracy ran along it into the hotel. She was not in the lobby. He went down the corridor with the ramp which led to the garage.

It was a dim cavern, few lights on at this hour. The night man was not visible. Tracy sent a hurried glance over the ranks of cars, wondering if she was already gone. Then headlights flashed at the far end of the place and a two-seated Thunderbird came at him with a sudden rush.

She stopped alongside him. She said, "Is everything all right?"

"Yes. You're leaving?"

Yolanda nodded. "Back to the house. I'm suddenly rather tired."

A coldness was in her words, an indrawn expression showed on her features. The moments of intimacy on the path were definitely over.

Had she regretted her ardent kiss, her offer of another? Tracy did not think so. The strange fear in the woman, he felt, was driving her away. "Will I see you again soon?" he asked.

"I—I hope so. Good night."

The car swooped off into the night. He looked after it, wondering why she was going back to the dreary house her great-grandfather had built. Rent was being paid on a lanai suite here at the hotel; why did she not use it?

Yolanda had said Ralph Cotter had the key to the suite. Even if he was withholding it from her though, she could rent one of her own. She could rent a whole floor and hardly notice the cost.

Perhaps the bargain she had mentioned reaching with Cotter included a proviso that she must spend her nights at the house, and it was part of his hectoring dominance that he would not let her use the suite. Tracy supposed this must be the reason.

He tramped back up to the lobby, abruptly feeling rather tired. It had been a long and wearing day.

The lobby, a beehive of activity during the day and early evening hours, was quiet now, almost deserted. A Hawaiian Eye guard on duty saluted him. Later, past midnight when the tourists began to pour in after their rounds of Honolulu night spots, the guard would be busy. There were always various small complaints to handle then.

Tracy picked up some cigarettes at the newsstand. He passed by the Shell Bar and Lounge. Cricket was singing. He paused for a moment to watch her, but did not go in. Tracy had a feeling he could not quite cope with Cricket tonight.

He went on to the office. Tom was at his desk, working on the Jolo contract again. He nodded without glancing up. Tracy stopped, looking down at him. "Tom, there was

more than happenstance in your being on hand to put the slug on LaDew, wasn't there?"

Tom hesitated, but for a second only. "Yes," he replied. "You've got a good face for poker, Tracy, but not for women. When you read the note Moke brought in, I had a strong idea who it was you were going to see. I felt it might be advisable to trail along."

"For God's sake, why?" Tracy demanded.

"Maybe I feel the way Cricket does," Tom replied slowly. "A feeling that the Destin woman can be the cause of trouble. Bad trouble."

Tracy snorted. Tom looked stubborn.

"She's *in* trouble," Tracy said. "But every time I'm on the verge of learning what the trouble is, something seems to happen. Tomorrow, though, I swear that I'm going to find some way to make her tell me! Now, put that confounded contract aside and let's phone for those steaks. I'm famished."

Past midnight, he came out of his bathroom, wearing an old oriental robe, a souvenir of Korea, made himself a nightcap and sat down at the divan in the living room, clinking ice cubes in the glass, thoughts still centered on Yolanda Destin.

His phone rang. Moke, on the office extension, said, "Mr. Steele, I have Mr. MacKenzie on the line. He told me to get you out of bed if I had to."

Tracy sent a startled glance toward a wall clock. It was past two in the morning at the Golden Gate. What did Greg have to say at such an hour?

He quickly found out. There was no banter in Greg MacKenzie this time. "Tracy, I just got back from Berkeley, have been over there for hours trying to run something down. I'll dig at it again tomorrow until I find an answer. Somebody else is involved in that Destin case, another woman. I've been trying to find out something about her."

Tracy's brows shot up. "Another woman?"

"Yes. I got a copy of the United passenger list out of San Francisco when Cotter and two women started east on their trip around the world. Cotter was on the list. So

was Mae Gamble. But Yolanda Destin wasn't. Instead, another woman was listed as traveling with those two, and so far I haven't been able to locate anybody who knows her—a woman by the name of Doris Varney.”

## Eight

Tracy Steele was up at eight the following morning, showered, shaved quickly and trimmed his mustache, studied himself in the bathroom mirror—the planes of his features, knob of chin and straight-bridged nose. He remembered a woman who had once said the mustache gave him a satanic look, wondered what Yolanda Destin's secret opinion of him might be, then snorted, doused lotion on his face and went to select a suit of tan tussah silk.

Tom was already up and out.

Following the call from Greg the night before, Tracy had climbed the stairs to his apartment. Tom, in pajama pants, was doing his nightly fifty push-ups, muscles of chest and arms like rippling cables. "Another woman!" he had exclaimed. "Now, just what in blazes does that mean?"

"Doris Varney's home address was listed as Berkeley on the United passenger list," Tracy told him, "but Greg drew a blank there, possibly because he was doing his checking so late at night. I'm banking on him to have an answer for us today. Maybe it will mean something, maybe not."

Tom nodded in agreement that they should not leap to another conclusion only because of this report of a mystery woman. "It seems rather strange there hasn't been any reference to her from Yolanda Destin," he commented. "Tracy, there's an odd notion stirring around in my head. Could a Doris Varney have left San Francisco, to change her name to Yolanda Destin somewhere en route on that trip around the world—?"



"Tom, I thought of the same thing. But it seems just a little too farfetched."

"Why? A big pile of money is involved, apparently controlled by Ralph Cotter—but only as long as Yolanda Destin is alive. Suppose something happened to her? Suppose Cotter thought of setting up another woman to pose as Yolanda? Remember that Greg said Yolanda was virtually unknown around San Francisco. And who knows her in Honolulu?"

Tracy frowned. "I just can't buy it," he said.

"We've been looking for a blackmail angle," Tom reminded him. "This one is perfect! Mae Gamble knows who the woman really is—!"

But he caught himself, frowning also. "Would Cotter have been fool enough to take Mae Gamble along on the trip if he had been planning such a thing, though? I wonder."

"Let's sleep on it," Tracy proposed, "and do some checking of our own in the morning."

"I'll start the wheels turning at Pan-Am, and see what they can find out for us from their flight records," Tom agreed.

Tracy started out then, but paused. "Tom, how much do you believe in coincidence?"

"Well, I once ran into a girl at the corner of Forty-Second and Broadway in New York whom I used to date at the university here," Tom replied, chuckling.

Tracy smiled, "And—?"

"And nothing," Tom said ruefully. "Her husband was with her. What coincidence is bothering you?"

"That Mae Gamble was our receptionist. Did it just happen that way or did she angle for the job—and if so, why?" Tracy thought about this, and continued, "Cotter and Yolanda stopped in the hotel here for two days before going to the Destin house. Did Mae stay here, also—?"

"We can find out," Tom said, and reached for a bedside phone. He spoke briefly to the night room clerk in the lobby, then reported, "La Gamble occupied an inside room for two days. Cotter paid for it."

"During which time, she could have done a bit of check-

ing, could have learned about the hotel secretarial pool and also that we were in need of a new receptionist," Tracy said. "Did she make a pitch for the job, with the thought of using us in pushing her scheme to shake money out of Yolanda?"

"Could be. I'll try to find out, first thing in the morning," Tom Lopaka said.

Tracy had breakfast on the terrace, fresh pineapple juice, sliced mango, toast and coffee.

If there was a best time of day in the islands, he reflected, this must be it—bright sun, the ocean sparkling, the world clean-swept by wind and rain. A considerable number of women already on the beach in colorful bathing suits added just the right touch to the scene.

Cricket added something to it, also. She came along, crisp in a frilly blouse and wrap-around skirt, to pull out a chair and sit down, then regard him moodily. As a usual thing Cricket would not be around so early, but her apartment on Aloha Drive was being redecorated and she had taken a room at the hotel for several weeks.

"Coffee, lover?" Tracy inquired.

She shook her head, and plunged at once into what was on her mind, "I know I'm terribly dense at times. I didn't catch on until last night, when I heard about a story in the papers, that something happened at your place. Why didn't you tell me?"

"What happened was rather grim," Tracy replied. "I didn't want to upset you by talking about it."

"Upset me? My goodness, you talk as though I'm something fragile that has to be kept under glass! Listen, Tracy Steele, I'm old enough to vote—and I did, too, in the last election!"

She leaned forward intensely. "I can tell that more things are happening. I want to help!"

He sighed, shaking his head. "I don't want you involved, lover."

"Why not? And I wish you wouldn't call me that so much—not in public, anyway. People might begin to get wrong ideas."

"You could be right," Tracy said. "Okay, I won't call you that so much . . . Chryseis."

This was her true first name, utterly loathed by Cricket. She said, "Darn it, call me anything but don't call me that! And let me help some way. Please, Tracy!"

This was not the best of ways to start the day, he thought.

Her eyes, seeming to reflect the sky's deep blue tint begged him to say yes.

But he stayed silent, and she continued, "It's that woman! She is the reason you don't want me around."

"Oh, nonsense!" Tracy said.

Cricket looked away from him toward the ocean. "I saw you kiss her, yesterday on the beach," she said.

"Now, lover, I'm grown up, also," Tracy said. "I've kissed several women, here and there."

"Not the way you kissed her, I'll bet," Cricket said. "It wasn't the way you've kissed me either, on the very few occasions when you have gotten around to it."

He had kissed Cricket Blake just twice, once at a New Year's Eve party, once following a Pearl Harbor Day memorial service when she had stood forlornly beside her father's grave. A Navy Commander, he had died heroically under the bombs on the grim December Seventh two decades ago.

Cricket pushed back her chair and stood up. "All right, Tracy. I won't bother you any more."

She walked away with great dignity, head high, back stiff. Every male eye on the terrace was fixed on her. Tracy was half minded to call her back, to say she could help all she liked and then to figure out something that would keep her busy but out of any possible involvement.

He repressed the impulse; he had learned that Cricket had a way of becoming involved, given half a chance, no matter how much effort was exerted to keep her from doing so.

Tracy wondered if there had been an edged quality in this disagreement with Cricket that was different from their customary wrangles, and whether it might be difficult to restore their usual camaraderie—whether in fact there was

something about the whole case that might mark a complete turning point in his life if his relations with Yolanda Destin continued as they had been. It was another complication to add to those already plaguing him.

"Damn!" he sighed, and signaled for his check.

Kim was waiting outside of the office, bright-eyed and eager. Tracy detailed the things he wanted him to do. Kim then whirled away in his cab, at a speed which indicated he would likely be trying to talk himself out of another traffic ticket before long.

Tom, at his desk, was sorting through the mail.

"The Pan-Am people are checking back on their passenger lists and will give us a report as soon as possible," he reported. "No further word has come in from Greg."

"I've got Kim out looking for those former Destin servants that Yolanda mentioned," Tracy said.

Tom glanced to him in some surprise. "Where is the point in doing that?" he asked. Then, "You hope to find one of them and settle at once whether she is actually Yolanda—?"

"Partially, though I still don't buy the possibility that she isn't," Tracy replied. "I'm more interested in the pilikia that made her mother leave the islands."

"You think that might figure in all this?"

"There is no telling, Tom. A blackmail case always has depth, roots going into the past, sometimes for years. A good deal of digging seems called for in this one."

"If it is a blackmail case," Tom pointed out wryly. "We're not even sure of that yet."

"Right," Tracy agreed. "We're not sure of anything. So we have to grope around and try to find a starting point of some kind, somewhere. Maybe the pilikia doesn't have anything to do with Mae Gamble and what she was trying to accomplish. I'd still like to know what the trouble was that drove the Destins away, though."

Bright sunlight poured in from the patio. The pool was a turquoise glitter. Tracy glanced toward it, reflecting that if it could only speak a great many questions would be answered in a hurry.

"Well, I have one thing more," Tom said. "Mae Gamble knew our receptionist's job was open before she made her application for a job at the secretarial pool. She spoke of it at the time of applying. Immediately upon being accepted, she asked for a chance to try working for us."

Tracy sat down, clasped his hands behind his head and looked at the ceiling. "Let's check back on the timing. She arrived here with Cotter and Yolanda. They took a lanai suite—"

"Which they haven't relinquished," Tom interrupted, "though the floor manager reports it is not in use—one of the fifty-dollar-a-day suites on the third floor."

"Mae Gamble was given an inside room elsewhere in the hotel," Tracy continued. "Two days later she quit her job with them. Mae told LaDew later she was almost broke, perhaps the result of leaving Cotter and Yolanda so abruptly, and her act of checking into the Pacific Gem seems to verify that she was low on funds. I doubt if she was so broke, though, that an immediate job was absolutely necessary, and of course if she could collect big, and quickly, one wouldn't be needed. She applied for a job, though. What was the date on her application at the secretarial pool, Tom?"

"The twenty-first," Tom Lopaka replied.

Tracy did some mental arithmetic. "That was the day after she, Cotter and Yolanda arrived in Honolulu on the flight from Hong Kong, and the day before she left them. For a bet, she had her plans for blackmail all made, ready to seize any opportunity to implement them. Our receptionist's job must have offered her that opportunity. Why?"

"To use us as a front?" Tom suggested.

"Partially that, maybe. Partially also, I suspect, to appeal to us for help if her target turned stubborn—and dangerous."

"Which apparently happened," Tom said, rising and beginning to pace restlessly. "But she didn't appeal to us! Instead, she sent for Burrell, a move which would seem to indicate she had given up her hope of collecting."

"Not necessarily," Tracy disagreed. "I think she used

Burrell as a threat at her target. If his arrival was menace enough to force a payment, she could then brush him off with the statement she had been mistaken in whatever it was she told him over the phone—or he would never find her at all. I also think Mae decided that trying to use us was a mistake. She may have come in here with some notion we would be ready and willing to do anything for money, only to discover she was completely wrong, a discovery which would be enough to bring her to the decision that she must move at once on her own."

"That poor guy, Burrell, certainly got a raw deal if you are right," Tom commented. "He took a fearful wallop when she called him. He threw up his career for grabs and rushed here. If she then greeted him with the statement that it was all a mistake—I"

"Mae isn't a nice person," Tracy said. "I wish to God we could get our hands on her."

Tom stopped in front of Tracy's desk. He said slowly, "And somebody else is involved who also might not be a very nice person."

Tracy Steele tilted his chair forward. They exchanged a long glance. Then Tracy said, "Yolanda? Tom, please reserve judgment on her. She may not even be the blackmail target."

"You're thinking now about Cotter?" Tom Lopaka said. "I've considered that possibility too, of course. I know you're hoping to turn up somebody who can put him right here, either shortly before or shortly after Burrell walked in. But suppose he wasn't? We know Yolanda was here!"

"We also know she came back a second time, wanting us to find Mae for her, wanting to talk with the woman," Tracy reminded him. "It doesn't seem at all likely she would have done that if she had had any knowledge of what had happened to Burrell. It also doesn't seem likely she would have come to us at all if she had prior knowledge of what Mae Gamble was after, and why."

"Now that you bring that up, I have an interesting question for you," Tom Lopaka said. "Just why *did* Yolanda come to us? Why Hawaiian Eye?"

"She had spent two days in the hotel," Tracy said. "She could have heard about us."

They heard Irene Ling's lilting voice in the other office. Then Tracy's phone rang. He took the call. It was a routine matter, requiring him to wrench his thoughts back to the firm's bread-and-butter business, a reminder of what it was costing Hawaiian Eye to concentrate so much time and effort on a matter which, in all likelihood, would not pay them anything. But they couldn't let it go. They had to keep on.

When Tracy hung up Tom was showing a stubborn frown, an indication he was of the same opinion still where Yolanda Destin was concerned. But he did not again allude to this. Instead, "That infernal Gamble woman!" Tom said. "Look, I've just had a sudden brain wave. After Burrell was dumped in the pool, she chose the unlikeliest place in Honolulu, your apartment, as a hide-out. Where is the unlikeliest place for her to be now?"

Tracy studied him, then slapped his desk top in vexation that he had not thought of it himself. "The Destin house!" he exclaimed.

That enormous place, with its numerous rooms, must offer many hiding places. True, it seemed wholly illogical that she should be there. Why should Cotter or Yolanda or both grant her asylum?

But perhaps the roots of which he had spoken went so deep, with Mae knowing about them, that they did not dare turn her away.

Also, perhaps she knew something more now of even greater danger to them. Tracy glanced again to the pool, thinking of Burrell, thinking also of the koa-wood club which had been found beside it, trying for a moment to work out an explanation for the club.

But that could wait. If the woman could be found, she would tell them. And Tracy was more than half convinced already she would be found.

Tom was grinning excitedly. Action was his strong point. "Do you buy it, partner?" he demanded.

"All the way!" Tracy replied. "Get on the phone to Danny Quon and see if you can sell him also, Tom."

Somewhat later that morning, Ralph Cotter sat at a massive mahogany table that had been cleared for his use in the big front room of the Destin mansion. It was stacked high with papers. He sorted busily through them, pausing occasionally to examine one, eyes narrowed, lips moving, forming words written three-quarters of a century ago, now lines of faded ink on brittle, yellowing sheets.

The shutters were drawn at all of the windows, and the scattered bulbs in the chandeliers were burning. Cotter disliked sunlight. He recalled cool gray days beside the Golden Gate, his tastefully appointed study at the Sea Cliff house; he would soon be back there—and in those surroundings, Cotter hoped, memories of the dreadful laughter would die away and could be forgotten.

Yolanda came down the stairs from her room. She wore a negligee and was listlessly using a brush on her dark hair.

"Is there anything to drink around here?" she asked.

"Coffee in the kitchen," Cotter replied. "And food to make yourself some breakfast, if you want any."

She grimaced at this suggestion. "Why won't you hire a cook?" Yolanda demanded.

"Because we will soon be leaving Honolulu," Cotter replied.

She started. "How—how soon—"

"Tomorrow perhaps. I'll let you know."

"Well—I want something to drink, bourbon, brandy, anything. I need it, to endure this dreadful house!"

"There is no liquor here," Cotter told her. "And if you go down to Honolulu and start getting drunk—!"

"Oh, don't worry," Yolanda said. "I'm not that much of a fool. Stop talking as though I were a lush, because I'm not. I've had too much to drink only twice in my life. It just happened that I also got in trouble those two times."

"I remember that you got in trouble on a third occasion, though liquor had nothing to do with it," Cotter said bitingly.

She flinched. There was a sudden hunted look in her eyes. "You make me stay here and remember that," Yolanda said bitterly. "You're never going to let me forget, are you?"



"Never, as long as we are together," Cotter said. He picked up a letter opener and began to play with it, watching her, hard implacability in his thin features. "Of course, there is a way out for you, a way so that you won't have to listen to me reminding you of it—"

He let his voice trail off suggestively.

Yolanda turned and started back up the stairs. "I'm going to get dressed. Then I'm driving down to town for the day," she said.

She was putting him off again, and for a second he almost pulled her up short with the hard, lashing words which would tell this woman he meant to take no more of her evasions. But—not yet, Ralph Cotter decided. He could wait just a little longer. Also, he wanted his mind free for the important work on the letters and documents piled up on his table.

He spoke again, however, "Did you tell Steele to stop looking for Mae Gamble, to discontinue his interest in our affairs completely?"

"Yes," Yolanda answered shortly, without pausing, without looking around at him.

"Good," Cotter said, and squared away again to his perusal of the dusty old papers which told so much about the hot-eyed man who glared from his portrait nearby.

A little later there was a sudden pounding at the front door. Cotter looked up, startled. He frowned. A fist pounded again, harder. He pushed back his chair, reached for his cane and walked to the door, limping only slightly. He pulled the door open, squinting angrily as a flood of sunlight came rushing in.

A beefy, dark-featured individual leaning against the jamb showed a rubbery grin. He had a mass of oily black hair, a raw open cut on one cheek, and wore blue denim pants and a ragged red shirt. Deep slyness showed in his eyes as he looked Cotter over.

"Call me George LaDew," he said. "We got a friend in common, Mae Gamble. She mentioned you to me. Don't worry—!" he added quickly, as Cotter started to draw back with an angry scowl. "Nobody else knows that. The cops haven't got at me yet. I was roused some by a pri-

vate dick name of Steele, but kept my lip buttoned about you." The slyness in his eyes deepened. "I figured you sure weren't the one who hired Steele to look for Mae!"

Cotter sent a glance toward the stairs. They were empty. There was no danger of this conversation being overheard.

He returned attention to LaDew and said coldly, lips barely moving, "Just what did that woman say about me?"

"Only that she was putting the bite on, and you had to pay. She wouldn't say why. If she had"—LaDew grinned again—"I might try for a bite myself! But she didn't, so all I'm asking for is a few bucks, and I'm willing to do a little something for them. I've got a hunch you could use some help. Anything you want done, anything at all, just name it!"

Cotter studied him with distaste. But his pale marble eyes showed a touch of uncertainty.

"Look, I don't give a damn where Mae is or what happened to her," LaDew said. "All I want is some quick dough. Suppose you say it's no dice? So I go away and the cops probably pick me up soon, because I'm broke and will have to do some scrounging on the town where they'll be quick to notice. They've got no love for me; the squeeze will be on and I'll have to spill all I know about Mae. Is that the way you want it?"

Cotter considered, nibbling at his lip.

"If you're wondering why I haven't shown up sooner, I tied one on yesterday," LaDew said. "But I'm plenty sober now."

Cotter looked past him toward the road, beyond the iron-paling fence. A rattletrap Ford was visible there. "Is that your car?"

"Belongs to a friend of mine. He's the only one who knows I'm using it," LaDew replied.

Cotter reached an abrupt decision. "Perhaps you can handle something for me," he said. "There is a Thunderbird around at the side of this house. Take a good look at it; make sure of the license number. Then get your car away from here—"

He paused, studying LaDew with distaste again. "Don't you have anything to wear other than that shirt?"

The man shook his head. And Cotter continued, "I'll give you one of mine. When you leave, drive down Nuuanu a short distance and wait. In a little while the Thunderbird will be along—"

## Nine

Tracy braked the Chrysler to a stop. He and Tom Lopaka got out. Danny Quon's car pulled in behind them. Quon spoke to his driver, then came to peer through the fence at the Destin house. "Looks even worse by day, doesn't it?" he commented.

Tracy nodded in agreement. The house had a scabrous look in the bright sunlight. Even if restored to what it had been when new the place would hardly be worth preserving. Roger Destin had built in arrogance, rather than in beauty.

Quon wore a dubious look. He had agreed to procure a search warrant, but with the blunt comment that he was sticking his neck out a considerable distance. "I'll be bucking big money, and that's a chancy thing for a cop to do anywhere on suspicion alone," he had said. "For that matter, you guys are liable to get a club swung at you also if we draw a blank and Cotter winds up sore."

They were willing to risk this. As for Quon, with no trace of Mae Gamble uncovered he was at the point of being willing to try almost anything. The papers were playing the Burrell case today for what it was, murder. There was evidence that pressure was on the lieutenant to come up with something. The Navy was involved, and in Honolulu it was regarded as important to play ball with the Navy down the line, in everything.

The gate was unlocked and open today. The three walked together along the graveled drive, Tom looking about with lively interest. "A bulldozer could accom-

plish wonders in this yard," he remarked. "I'm beginning to wonder also why Mrs. Destin went away and let the place go to rack and ruin."

"Maybe she just got tired of looking at it," Quon muttered. "I would, if I had to live here."

Two cars were before them under a porte-cochere, the Cadillac and the Thunderbird. Beyond them several out-buildings were visible at the rear of the house. They had to work their way through the tangles of weeds and plants gone wild to the flagstoned walk and up on the porch, where Quon knocked at the big front door.

It was opened promptly by Cotter. Lifting his thin brows, he inquired, "Another visit, Lieutenant? What is your purpose this time? Has Aponi misbehaved again?"

"No, sir. I am here to search the house and area, and serve this on you as a legal warrant empowering me to do so," Quon replied, handing him a folded document of stiff, heavy paper. "I also will inform you that I am deputizing the two men who are with me to assist in the search, and warn that you will be subject to arrest if you attempt to hinder us."

Cotter glanced curiously at the warrant but made no attempt to read it. "A search? Just what do you expect to find?"

Quon said, "I am now engaged in an inquiry concerning homicide. If you have nothing to conceal, it will be to your advantage to have that fact placed on the record."

"Homicide?" Cotter said. "Good Lord, you don't mean Mae Gamble has turned up dead?"

"No," Quon said.

"So? It is police business and you do not mean to confide in me? Well, come on in. If there is anything concealed here I am not aware of it," Cotter told him. "You are welcome to poke and pry to your heart's content. As a matter of fact, I am glad to see you. An item has just turned up that I must share with someone!"

Tracy, stepping inside as Cotter returned to the table, noted that the man was not using his cane. He noted also a hard look sent his way, and introduced Tom Lopaka. Cotter, lip curling slightly, ignored the introduction.

He picked up a paper from the table and held it out to Quon. "This is a rare find, Lieutenant! It is a holographic letter written by Hawaii's last monarch, Queen Liliuokalani, to Roger Destin; she was giving the old pirate hell for his wickedness."

Quon glanced at the letter. "Interesting," he remarked politely.

"Oh, it is more than that, an item of great historical value. There has been a rumor that Roger virtually kidnaped one of Liliuokalani's court ladies and held her a prisoner in this house for a week or so—also that the lady in question made no very strenuous effort to escape. This letter confirms that rumor. I shall include it in my book. It is invaluable." He chuckled. "If only I knew what the reaction of Yolanda was to that bit of business—!"

Quon said, surprised, "Yolanda?"

"My cousin was named for her. The first Yolanda was Roger's wife," Cotter explained. "She was a wild, tempestuous creature. I have uncovered several hints that she may have done away with herself during a moment of raging fury, but I do not intend to allude to that in my book. I wonder what her reaction was to the kidnaping? She must have been absent at the time, probably on the mainland; otherwise I think she would have tried to kill both her husband and Liliuokalani's court lady. Not that she would have succeeded."

Cotter gestured to the portrait, to the hot eyes which seemed contemptuously to rake all of them. "That was Roger, Lieutenant. Nobody ever got the better of him. What he wanted, he took!"

"Probably not much law enforcement in those days to stop him," Quon commented dryly. "We'll get on with the search now."

Cotter smiled thinly. "By all means. Should you find anything of interest please let me know, particularly if it is upstairs. I haven't been there myself in a dozen or more years."

They took the downstairs area first, Quon leading the way into a big dining room, beyond that to a kitchen with old wood ranges.

Quon muttered, "The guy was laughing at us. I don't think we're going to come up with a thing."

Tracy noticed a hot-plate, plugged in at a drainboard, also sacks of food and evidences several meals had been prepared there.

They discovered a conservatory with a glass roof, boarded over, and the dead, withered stalks of many plants. Beyond that, off a corridor leading from the front of the house, there were several rooms, one with a rumpled bed and a number of pieces of expensive leather luggage. It was the room being used by Ralph Cotter.

Quon found something and said, "What the devil—?"

It was what had been a doorway, on the other side of the corridor. It had been bricked over, rather roughly, inexpertly.

Quon summoned Cotter, who used his cane now, limping a little, as he came to join them.

"That was a door opening into the cellar," he explained. "Roger was a New Englander originally, and couldn't envision a house without a cellar. I haven't any idea why the door was bricked over. It has been like that as far back as I can remember."

"How do we get into the cellar?" Quon asked.

"There is an outside entrance. It is locked, I believe."

He also claimed to have no idea where the key to the lock might be. "I presume Yolanda's mother had it. If the key is still in existence, it is probably in San Francisco."

"We'll have to break that outside cellar door open," Quon informed him.

Cotter shrugged, with no comment.

They moved upstairs then, to big, high-ceilinged rooms with covered furniture, always dust, mildew and decay everywhere, bathrooms with massive tubs and chain-pull fixtures; the house was apparently much as it had been when first occupied.

Quon discovered the room Yolanda was using, close to the head of the stairs on the second floor. Tracy heard the murmuring of their voices as Quon examined the room; he came out, rejoining them, to report she was apparently preparing to go out.

They came to what had been the master bedroom at the front of the house. Another portrait hung there, of a woman, dark-haired, sultrily beautiful, attired in a white satin gown of considerable décolletage which displayed a full bosom and gleaming shoulders.

"Roger's wife," Tom said. "Yolanda looks a lot like her." The resemblance, Tracy thought, was uncanny.

"Behaves a lot like her, too, from what I've heard," Quon growled. "Let's keep going."

They went on up to the third floor, then to the attic, investigating every nook and cranny. They found nothing.

Coming back down again, this time using back stairs which opened off the kitchen, Tracy said, "Thirty rooms in all. I had a feeling not many of them were ever really used very much."

Tom grinned. "I kept wondering which one old Roger kept his kidnaped lady in!"

"Outside, now," Danny Quon said.

One of the outbuildings had been a stable, with empty stalls and wisps of straw still on the floor. Tracy had a glimpse of Aleki Aponi, hastily backing away from them, then disappearing. "This must be where he sleeps," Tracy commented to Quon.

There was also a one-time carriage house some distance from the stable, used at a later date as a garage, with a tarpaulin-covered 1947 Cadillac, all tires gone flat, standing there. In a nearby room they found McLarnin, the caretaker. He was a crusty-mannered, white-haired man with the telltale cheek mottlings and red-veined eyes of a hard drinker.

McLarnin talked readily enough. He had been hired to live on the place, keep people away, and had done it, receiving his check every month from San Francisco for a dozen years. Per orders, he had stayed out of the locked-up house, and if Mrs. Destin had cared what happened to the grounds nobody had told him.

Aponi had come along some months back and McLarnin had allowed him to stay in the stable. Kids had been sneaking onto the place lately and throwing rocks at the windows.



The sight of Aponi had been enough to make them stop that.

McLarnin confessed that the sudden arrival of Ralph Cotter and Yolanda had scared him some; he had feared they would sell the place and he would lose his job. But Cotter had told him they meant to leave again soon and things would go on as before. He would continue to receive his checks. The house and land would not be sold.

Quon asked, "Has anybody else been here, other than those two?"

McLarnin promptly shook his head. "Nope. Nobody."

"This is important," Quon said sharply. "Are you sure?"

"Damn it, what reason would I have to say otherwise?"

McLarnin demanded irascibly. "I told you, nobody! I had to open up the house, turn on the lights and water, and I've been in there every day since, patching those old pipes and wires. If there was anybody else around, I'd know it!"

"Get a pinch-bar," Quon said. "We're going to break into the cellar."

This took some effort. The padlock was of steel, rusted, and could not be broken. The hasp was large, with long screws which had to be pried out one at a time. But at last they got the doors open, had a look and found nothing in the cellar either.

It seemed an odd sort of cellar, Tracy thought, very shallow, not even head-high, so that they had to stoop. The floor and sidings were of wood. It contained only a clutter of trash, stacks of old newspapers and magazines and many barrels containing discarded crockery and other items.

Tracy glanced at a newspaper on top of a pile. Its date was October 1, 1947.

They came out again. McLarnin had gone away.

They investigated the tangles of weeds, front and back.

"Nothing!" Quon said at last. "It's a complete blank."

Tom said tentatively, "Could there be something we've overlooked, perhaps? Destin put a cellar under his house. Could he also have included a hurricane room—hidden—?"

They had all heard of such rooms in old houses—

though Tracy could not recall ever having heard of one in Honolulu—usually somewhere at the center of a house, for refuge during times of great storms.

Quon shook his head. "I was checking measurements," he said. "There's nothing secret in that house, anywhere."

"The bricked-over door from the house to the cellar puzzles me," Tracy said. "Also, why is the cellar itself so shallow?"

Quon grunted impatiently. "Let's go back inside. I've got a question for Cotter. His answer might gain us a lot more than all of this poking around."

Cotter was still at his table. He looked up, showing the thin smile again. "Well, Lieutenant—?"

Quon studied him, his jaw displaying the bulldog jut it could assume on occasion. He spoke with brusque directness, "Mr. Cotter, where is a woman named Doris Varney?"

The smile vanished. A muscle in Cotter's cheek twitched. Tracy detected an odd, momentary flickering in his eyes. But the man's demeanor was unruffled as he replied.

"She is in a grave in Malaya," Cotter said. "Doris Varney is dead."

A long moment of silence crawled past. Tracy heard a clatter of heel-taps overhead, heard a door open and close. Yolanda was moving about upstairs.

Cotter was waiting for Quon, who said at last, "I would like a full explanation."

"I think I might challenge your right to require anything further of me, Lieutenant. However"—he shrugged, reaching for his cane—"there is nothing whatever to conceal. Exactly what is it you want to know?"

"Who was she? How did she happen to be with you on that trip you took? I want to hear it all," Quon said.

"Very well. Doris Varney was a young woman who applied to me for a position in response to various inquiries I made for someone experienced in research who could help me in writing Roger Destin's biography. She represented herself as having been a graduate student at the University of California. It was immediately apparent she

was quite competent. I was pleased to employ her."

"On the understanding she was to make the trip around the world with you?" Quon asked.

"Exactly. Roger was engaged in activities all over the world during various phases of his life. He held a captain's ticket in sail and there were few ports he did not touch in his own ships. I looked for—and found—much rich material in New York, London, and particularly in the Orient when we arrived there. Miss Gamble also went along. I included her partially for reasons of propriety, even though my relations with Miss Varney were strictly those of employer and employee. Miss Gamble also made herself useful, doing the secretarial work that was required."

Tracy had a question, "When did Yolanda Destin join you?"

Cotter sent him a cold glance. "Just before our departure from New York," he replied shortly.

He then lifted the cane and sighted along it toward Roger Destin's portrait. "Unfortunately, Doris Varney had an affliction which resulted in her death."

All of them stiffened. Quon said sharply, "Affliction—?"

"Somnambulism, Lieutenant," Cotter replied. The young lady walked in her sleep. I first became aware of it in Calcutta. There was a recurrence in Rangoon. On both occasions she was walking along a hotel corridor in her nightgown when detected and returned to her room. It was disconcerting—and embarrassing. I suggested medical treatment. Doris told me she had tried various treatments, that none of them did her any good. However, she did consult the hotel doctor in Rangoon. From there we went on to Singapore."

He fell silent again, head tipped down, as though thinking.

Quon said, "Go on."

"I find that it is painful to relate what I must tell you now, Lieutenant. But—very well. From Singapore, we drove north to a coastal town named Kuantan; I had learned that Roger, as a young man, new to the Orient,

had for a time engaged in various activities there, colorful and to some extent illegal.

"We took lodgings in a hotel which had a number of bungalows scattered about in pleasant gardens. I took one bungalow, Yolanda another. Doris and Mae Gamble were together in a third. It was at the edge of the town and a highway ran nearby."

He paused anew, shook out a breast pocket handkerchief and patted his lips. "Past midnight, on our second night in that place, Doris Varney walked in her sleep again. The police came and awakened me. She had been struck by a bus on that nearby highway. Death, according to the medical report, had been instantaneous."

The silence, now, was profound. Tracy felt a sense of oppression. Tom, he noticed, had his eyes riveted on Cotter's pale, taut features.

Danny Quon wore his inscrutable look—indicative, Tracy thought, that his brain was working at top speed, weighing and evaluating all he had heard.

"She was buried in the English cemetery at Kuantan," Cotter said presently. "I paid for everything of course."

"Whom did you notify of her death?" Quon asked.

"It was reported, of course, to the American consul at Singapore. Other than that, I knew of no one to notify."

Then, as Quon's features quickly altered to a hard questioning, Cotter spread his hands in a gesture of helplessness.

"She had not spoken of relatives or friends," he protested. "As reference, Doris had given me the name of a professor at the University of California, but I had not bothered to contact him, and his name had slipped my memory. As far as I know she did not send any mail or receive any during the course of the trip. My impression of her was of someone who was quite alone in the world."

"No husband? No sweetheart?" Quon prodded.

"I have already answered you, Lieutenant," Cotter said with a sudden touch of heat. "What else do you want to know? About her effects, perhaps? They are in the two suitcases and a hat-box which she used during the trip,

presently in a locker at the airport here. I went through them in an effort to find a name and address of someone to notify, without success. I am quite ready to turn them over to anyone who can prove a right to possession."

Quon said, "One thing more—do you have any proof with you of the accidental nature of her death?"

"I do, a photostatic copy of the death certificate, and a letter from the medical examiner stating autopsy findings," Cotter said. "They are in an attaché case in my room. You wish to see them?"

"I wish to see them," Quon said.

"Very well. But my leg is beginning to bother me, no doubt a result of having to recall such a harrowing experience. Would you be good enough to bring me the case? It is quite visible, on the bureau there—and you are familiar with the location of the room, having been through it."

Quon nodded, starting to turn away. Then he stopped. Yolanda was coming down the stairs.

She wore a pale gray shantung dress with white pumps, and carried a white bag and gloves. Tracy saw her start, features going pale at sight of them, saw the indications of fear surfacing again in the features of Yolanda Destin.

Quon said, "Miss Destin, I want you to tell me all you know about a woman named Doris Varney."

She swallowed nervously. "What about her? Doris is dead. She was killed in an accident in Malaya."

"All you know, please," Quon ordered.

"Very well. Let's see, I first met her in New York. . . ."

Yolanda went on from there. What she had to say corroborated Ralph Cotter's story at every point.

The three of them walked out together presently.

"So where are we now?" Danny Quon inquired, then answered himself morosely, "Nowhere. Nothing in that house, no sign of Mae Gamble; I thought for a minute or so we might be on to something with the talk about Doris Varney, but they both told the same story—without collusion, either, because I kept one ear cocked toward the

staircase and she stayed in her room while he was talking. Also, those papers from Malaya that Cotter showed us backed them up."

"Those papers should be checked," Tracy said.

"How?" Quon demanded.

"There are phones virtually everywhere now, Danny," Tracy said. "Call Malaya."

Quon snorted. "A call concerning something tabbed as accidental that happened halfway around the world from my jurisdiction? You know who would have to pay for it? Me!"

Tracy smiled. "Hawaiian Eye will pay," he said.

"Okay! Let's go do it," Quon agreed with alacrity.

Tom said, "Danny, why didn't you mention Burrell to Cotter?"

"Two reasons," Quon told him. "One, it might warn the guy to start running, and the way things are there's no way I could stop him. An order not to leave town is all right in cop stories on TV, but it's different when you really try saying it, especially to someone with dough for lawyers who could road-block me with more writs and court orders than I could get past in a year."

"What was your second reason?" Tom asked.

"Mae Gamble," Quon said grimly. "I'm beginning to be afraid, with all the time that has elapsed, that Mae might be dead. If she isn't—well, I could foresee a chance I might be signing her death warrant if I made any mention of Burrell to Cotter."

"I'll buy your reasons," Tom said. "And I've got something for you to buy, that we know now who Burrell was—the sweetheart of the woman who died in Malaya—and the reason why he came to Honolulu in such a hurry. Mae told him it wasn't an accidental death, but that she was murdered. Also, I'll nominate the killer, if nobody else wants to, not only of the woman but also of Burrell."

Tracy glanced toward the house. Yolanda had not come out. He wondered if she was waiting for him to leave before she did so.

"Tom, what we think we know and what we can prove

are too damned far apart," Quon said. "I can't haul in and hold anybody on what we have now, not for as much as ten minutes."

"Suppose we come up with a witness who saw someone else go into our office when Burrell was there?" Tom Lopaka demanded.

Quon sighed. "I need more; I need Mae Gamble!"

"Or something to disprove the story we heard about Doris Varney," Tracy said. "Let's go make that phone call to Malaya."

In the house Cotter spoke to the woman bitingly, "You told me that you ordered Steele to take his nose out of our affairs!"

"I did do that!" she protested.

"Then you'll do it again!" Cotter told her.

He thumped the floor hard with his cane. "That cop, with his warrant, caught me off-balance. I had no choice but to let him poke about. If Quon tries such a thing again I'll be ready. I'll stop him cold. Steele is a different matter. He may attempt another search on his own, surreptitiously. And if he comes back, if there is a closer search of this house—! Do I have to say anything more?"

She shivered, clutching her bag hard with both hands. "No," Yolanda whispered. "I—I know what could happen."

"Then stop him! I don't care what you have to do, but make sure this time, with no slip-ups, that he doesn't come here again. Now go find him and do it!"

Yolanda nodded jerkily. "All right."

She went to the front door and out, walking unsteadily. After a bit Ralph Cotter shook his head and pushed himself to his feet, with anger for the fools who were bothering him, with knowledge that the time had come when he must alter his plans.

Because of the woman who had just left, it must be done. He might have put too much fear in her, Cotter thought, though he could make good use of that fear later on. If she could nullify Tracy Steele for only as much as the rest of this day and night, however, well and good; if not he would act himself. And in the meantime he had to make arrangements for leaving this place, even though

his work here was not quite completed, to end the possibility that those prying searchers might by accident stumble onto something.

His quick, agile mind was at work on what he meant to do as he limped out to the rented Cadillac, backed to the road and headed toward downtown Honolulu. With some effort he managed to keep from thinking about Kuantan and the laughter.



# Ten

Lieutenant Danny Quon's office in the police building downtown, four blocks from Iolani Palace, with a view across busy Queen Street past pier 12 to the harbor, was indicative of his status. It was a fairly commodious room, well-furnished, with area enough for Tom Lopaka to pace, frowning in frustration, plowing fingers impatiently through his thick dark hair. Tom was depressed by the fact that his hunch about Mae Gamble being concealed somewhere in the Destin house had been proved wrong.

"Danny, can you put a stake-out on that house?" he asked.

"No!" Quon replied. "With what we have turned up so far, I couldn't justify the use of men for such a purpose."

Tracy stood with a phone receiver to his ear, listening to a faint crackling of static and the singsong of the various operators as a circuit was established to Singapore and on to Kuantan.

Tom had said, "Maybe we ought to wait. It's sometime tomorrow in Malaya; there might not be anybody around who knows the answers."

"Maybe," Tracy had conceded. "But we had better give it a try. We don't have all the time in the world at our disposal. Even if Danny didn't mention Burrell to Cotter, the guy is razor-sharp; he and Yolanda may be on a plane east if we don't come up with something pretty quick."

Quon, at his desk, was digging through accumulated reports. "Nothing!" he muttered. "Nothing on Mae Gamble,

no one who saw anybody go into your office!"

He pushed the reports aside, rose, and went to stand with Tom, who said, "There's a feeling in me that we missed something in that house, something right under our noses. Maybe we ought to go back and try again."

"No!" Quon said decisively. "I had to do some arguing to get approval of one warrant. I would never get approval for another and would land on the carpet besides. Tom, what could we have missed? We didn't overlook a thing."

"I'm thinking about that door from the house into the cellar. Why was it bricked up?" Tom said. "Why, for that matter, is there such a shallow cellar under the house? It just doesn't make sense that it wasn't dug deeper."

"Look, we went out there to hunt for Mae Gamble. We didn't find her," Quon said. "I'm convinced she isn't there—and now, thinking about it, I can't figure a very logical reason why she should ever have been there. I was grabbing at straws, letting you two talk me into the search. I'm writing it off the books and going back to scouring the town for her."

Danny Quon was becoming short-tempered as pressure increased.

Tracy said, "Get on your other phone, Danny. We're through to Kuantan."

Quon hurried around his desk. Tom moved alongside Tracy, who turned his phone so they could listen together.

Someone speaking precise English, only slightly accented, identified himself as Assistant Commissioner of Police Ponggapo. Quon identified himself and tensely put the question concerning Doris Varney.

"A sad affair, sir," the man in Kuantan replied promptly. "I am quite familiar with it, since I was on duty on the night in question and arrived very quickly on the scene."

There was an abrupt downward slope on the highway near the hotel, and a sharp turn at the bottom, he continued. The accident had occurred there. The bus had been bound southwest toward Kuala Lumpur with a full load of drowsing passengers. The driver had not noticed the woman in the road at all, had felt the thump of hitting her as he

made the sharp turn and had jammed on the brakes, sliding to a stop. He had leaped out, to make the horrifying discovery that she had been caught under the wheels and dragged.

Some confusion had ensued, the assistant commissioner went on, since the woman had been attired only in a nightgown. That she was white had offered a clue. A clerk was summoned from the hotel. He could not make an identification, due to the condition of the body, but had reported there were three white women in the bungalows.

Ponggapo himself had roused Ralph Cotter and the other two white women. Their reactions, he stated, had been of shock and grief, with immediate reference to her sleepwalking habits.

"That was checked with Rangoon," the assistant commissioner said. "We were told that she did indeed walk in her sleep there, during the course of the trip the group was taking."

"Was an autopsy performed?" Quon asked.

"Yes, sir. Its findings were that she died instantaneously as a result of being struck by the bus. Our police surgeon stated the cause of death was severe damage to the head and brain in the moment of impact."

Every effort, he concluded, had been made to find someone who might have seen her immediately prior to the accident, but without success. "The hotel is located in a rather quiet and secluded section of our city. There are few lights along the highway, widely scattered. Also, our people are in the habit of retiring rather early. We found no witnesses. However, there seemed no reason to question any of the evidence. The case has been marked closed."

Quon chewed his lip. He glanced to Tracy, who shook his head, indicating he had no questions to ask. Tom did the same.

"So—nothing there either," Quon sighed, after thanking the assistant commissioner in Malaya and hanging up.

"I have another call in, to the U.S. consulate in Singapore," Tracy said. "They might have a little more to offer."

But this resulted in nothing also. An assistant consul had gone north to Kuantan to check, had examined the dead

woman's effects, and had attended the funeral. He had found no reason to question the police findings. Doris Varney's things had been left in the keeping of Ralph Cotter, since he had offered to make every effort to find someone to whom they could be delivered in the United States.

A long moment of silence ensued after Quon hung up again.

Tom broke it; "I say the whole thing was rigged—murder, made to look like an accident, also that that was what Mae passed along in her call to Burrell. And I say again that maybe it wasn't Doris Varney who was buried in Kuantan—but Yolanda Destin!"

"And Yolanda Destin was Burrell's girl friend?" Quon said.

"Right," Tom said. "Doris Varney could have been picked deliberately because of her resemblance to Yolanda, with Cotter's plans all made to get rid of his cousin in some out-of-the-way place, then a quick shuffling of passports and a quick switch of identities. The sleep-walking could have been staged to set it up. Mae could have been involved. His motive? He controlled the Destin money. But with Mrs. Destin dead, Yolanda could have been bucking him, trying to get it all in her own hands and to be rid of Cotter. The substitution of another woman, though, would still leave him in control."

"Tom, I still can't buy it," Tracy said. "It assumes a scheme that is just too elaborate. Even if everything had fallen into place exactly right for Cotter in Kuantan, even if trust placed in Mae Gamble had paid off, there was the overwhelming danger it would collapse at any minute once they were back in San Francisco."

"Greg told us Yolanda was almost unknown there," Tom reminded him.

"But she can't be completely unknown," Tracy said. "She must have some friends, acquaintances, and any one of them would expose the whole thing instantly upon seeing another woman."

"But maybe Cotter planned it so no one would have a chance to see her—to make a fast transfer of the Destin estate into his own hands, then to get rid of her. He could

promise Doris Varney anything, but if he had already killed one woman what was to stop him from killing another?"

Quon slapped his desk. "This is all wild guesswork! I don't buy it either. I've worked some before with those police in the Malay States, had a chance to go out there a few years ago on a case and I found that they're pretty sharp, nobody's fools. They wouldn't let a woman named to them as Doris Varney be buried without making sure it wasn't somebody else."

"Cotter is nobody's fool either. He might have found a way to hoodwink them," Tom said. "Also—what motive could he have had for killing Doris Varney? Look, you could at least try to find out if the woman we saw at the house a while ago is actually Yolanda Destin."

"Yes, I could do that," Quon conceded. "I'll ask Washington if there is any record on her. But let's stay on the main track. Just what do we have, in this whole Kuantan business?"

Tracy made the reply, "A death of a woman named Doris Varney that is listed as accidental."

"Right!" Quon said. "And nothing else!"

"But," Tom put in stubbornly, "Mae Gamble knows it wasn't an accidental death!"

"So we forget about Kuantan and go back hunting for Mae Gamble; find her and we'll learn for certain whether she really knows that!" Quon said. Then he chewed his lip again, "Providing Mae isn't found dead—"

"I have a feeling she is very much alive," Tracy said slowly. "Don't ask me why I feel that way; I haven't got it all worked out in my mind yet. And—forget Kuantan? I agree, Danny, to the extent that there is nothing more we can do about it at present. But there is one thing that I think we had better keep in mind."

"What?" Quon demanded.

"The official findings on the cause of death, severe damage to the head and brain," Tracy said. "That was what also caused the death of Jack Burrell."

Tracy Steele and Tom Lopaka returned to the Hawaiian Village, where they had a belated lunch on the terrace,

though neither felt very hungry. Quon had been invited to accompany them but had been too busy to accept.

Tom fretfully made bread pills. "I have a hunch the answer to the whole thing is so close we could almost reach out and touch it!"

Tracy glanced about at the brightly sunlit scene, the gaily colored umbrellas, the bustle of activity both here and on the beach; he shook his head.

"I don't think so," he disagreed. "I think it's a rather intricate tangle—not that it might not be possible to reach the heart of the matter pretty quickly, providing we only knew a little more."

"Well, maybe. And I don't want to sound like a Johnny One Note about Yolanda Destin being trouble, about the possibility of her being an imposter . . . still, there are things that point to both facts being true," Tom said. "When we were at that house, for instance, she was afraid of something. I felt that, strongly."

"So did I," Tracy said.

"Afraid that we would find out the truth about her?"

"Tom, let's not do any more guessing. It doesn't get us anywhere."

"Okay," Tom Lopaka agreed, though reluctantly. "I suppose Danny is right. We have to get on the ball and find Mae Gamble. I think I'll devote the afternoon to checking every informant we know. Blast it, somebody must know what happened to that woman!"

"I'll stop by the office," Tracy decided. "One of us ought to look in on the store every now and then."

He stopped by his apartment first though, to discover the stepladder had been returned and was on the service porch. Several other items were also there. They puzzled Tracy. He saw a pair of coveralls he had used for working on a sports car he had once owned, and a cloth cap bearing the hotel seal which had found its way into the apartment perhaps a year ago.

The last time he had seen the coveralls they had been hanging in a kitchen broom-closet. As for the cap he couldn't remember where it had been. But to the best of his

recollection neither of them had been on the service porch the last several days.

He went on to the office. The report from Pan-Am was in, stating only that Ralph Cotter, Yolanda Destin and Mae Gamble had made the flight from Hong Kong to Honolulu.

Kim was waiting for him impatiently. But Irene Ling had a message he must handle immediately; a San Francisco operator wanted either Tracy Steele or Tom Lopaka, for Greg MacKenzie.

Greg said, "I'm ready to fill you in on what I've found out about Doris Varney. It isn't much."

What he had learned checked with what Cotter had told them. She had been a graduate student at the University of California, had lived in Berkeley and no one had seemed to know her very well. Her record at the university stated she had been an orphan, with no next of kin listed.

Greg had located a professor who had known her slightly, had known of her employment by Cotter and of her departure with him on a trip around the world. Greg had also managed to get a check on their departure from New York; there had been four in the party then, including Yolanda Destin.

Tracy said, "Have you managed to discover any link between Doris Varney and Jack Burrell?"

"No," Greg replied. "The manager at her Berkeley apartment house said she received a number of phone calls and letters, and twice Doris was seen with a man. But there is no make on him."

Tracy told then of what had happened in Malaya. Greg whistled softly. "I don't suppose I could turn up anything on that here," he commented. "But if you'd like me to try—?"

"I think it's all a dead end there," Tracy said. "You might as well come on home, Greg, and join the hunt for Mae Gamble."

"Will do," Greg agreed. "There's a non-scheduled flight leaving for Honolulu sometime after five. I'll try to be on it."

Tracy turned then to Kim, who had things to report. Concerning the attempt to locate a witness who had seen

anybody entering the office between one and two on the day of Burrell's assault, he had drawn a blank. Only Kim himself, seeing Yolanda walk in twice, apparently had noticed anything at all.

"It seem like the street empty about then," Kim said. "I ask everybody. Not learn anything."

He was somewhat crestfallen about that. Tracy reassured him; Danny Quon was drawing a blank also, in the same search.

"What else did you manage to find out, Kamaaina?" Tracy said.

"Well, I ask too about those people who work one time at Destin house," Kim replied. "And I find out a little bit."

Casey Maddern, the chauffeur, had been dead for some years, he went on. Concerning Manolo Fabregas, he had drawn another blank. Manolo was remembered well and not favorably; there had been plenty of comments concerning him. "Mean man, everybody say that," Kim reported. "Drink a lot, get in trouble a lot, nobody like him. But nobody know anything about what happen to him either. I find fellow who say think maybe he go back to Philippines. That all I find about Manolo. Also, people tell about another servant who work at Destin house, a cook, but she haole and move to mainland years ago."

Tracy, realizing Kim was holding something for the last, smiled and said, "Okay, let's have the snapper now. There's only one person you haven't mentioned—Milliama, Miss Destin's nurse when she was a child. Did you find her for me?"

Kim grinned, bobbing his head energetically. "Find where she is, living now just west of Kaneohe with grandson. His name Mike Keoki, everybody know him. You want me to take you there? Quick trip, nice ride!"

"Maybe you've made a deal," Tracy said.

He considered, thinking not so much of Milliama as of what Kim had said about Manolo Fabregas. Tracy turned to Irene Ling. "Get me Lieutenant Quon's office at police headquarters, please. The number is 9-73311."

Danny Quon was short-tempered. "Tracy, I'm snowed under."



"Sorry to disturb you, Danny," Tracy said. "Would it be possible to check your files on that one-time Destin groom, Manolo—probably listed as Manuel—Fabregas?"

"Hang on," Quon grunted.

He returned, moments later. "A record as long as your arm, though mostly petty stuff, drunk and disorderly, minor assaults, a couple of cutting scrapes. Nothing recent; the last arrest was twelve years ago."

"That was about the time the Destins moved to the mainland," Tracy reflected. "I wonder why the record ended then?"

"Boats and planes are leaving every day. He probably cleared out also," Quon said. "Look, don't bring up a guy who hasn't been around for twelve years and ask me to find him too!"

"It probably won't be necessary," Tracy said. "Kim has located Milliamia, Yolanda's one-time nurse. She is living over by Kaneohe, and can probably tell what happened to him. I am leaving now to talk to her."

"That isn't all she can tell!" Quon rejoined. "Or do I have to remind you?"

No. He did not need a reminder. "I'll fill you in when I get back," Tracy said.

Kim led the way out. They got into his cab. He drove at his usual headlong rush, threading through traffic to Ala Moana Boulevard, taking the wide curve toward the center of town.

Kim said, "Mis' Destin, she in some kind of trouble, huh, Mr. Steele?"

"Possibly," Tracy said.

"She mighty pretty lady," Kim said. "I see her, while ago, walking on Kalakaua. Men all turn to look. She not pay attention to anybody though."

Tracy cried, "Whoa! Pull over! Where on Kalakaua did you see her?"

Kim swerved the cab to the side of the boulevard and stopped. "By Kaiolu, or somewhere along there," he said. "She walk slow, seem like window shop."

"Head back!" Tracy ordered.

She was still on Kalakaua Avenue, in the area of smart

shops near the Royal Hawaiian, moving slowly along, seemingly lost in thought. When Tracy slid from the cab and moved to touch her arm, Yolanda started violently, turning on him, then showed an unsteady smile.

"Hello," she said. "I've been wanting to see you. But I called your office, and the girl there said you weren't in. I've just been killing time until I called again."

Tracy said, "I must run an errand over to Kaneohe. That's across the mountains to the northeast, by way of the Pali, not far and quite scenic. Perhaps you would like to go along?"

"All right," Yolanda agreed, but then glanced at the cab and added, "why don't we take my car? It's costing enough and might as well have some use. I'm parked only about a block away."

Tracy nodded and gestured in dismissal to Kim, who grimaced in disappointment. He took Yolanda's arm and they moved along the walk, sunshine bright on them and a strong breeze molding the dress against the woman's body.

All of Tracy's nerves began to tighten. Tom's theory would now be put to the test. If she was not Yolanda Destin, Milliamia should know instantly.

## Eleven

"There is one thing I want you to know," Yolanda said. "I started to tell you about Doris Varney last night on the path. It was just before you put your hand over my mouth and told me to keep quiet."

Tracy nodded, remembering. They were on the new highway which branched away to Lanikai beyond the Pali. He was driving.

She continued, "I can't add very much to what Ralph told you. That night at Kuantan I was awakened by the police. All of us were asked to—to identify her. It was rather horrifying."

Yolanda looked ahead toward the approaching mountains, the Koolau range, bright and verdant in their greenery.

"I never knew Doris very well," she said. "We were not what the Spanish call simpatico. Perhaps it might have been different if the trip had been more pleasant for me. It wasn't. I didn't particularly want to go along, but there were reasons why I felt that I must."

Tracy listened, hands light on the wheel, holding the spirited little car to an easy pace.

Yolanda went on, "I had a feeling there was something bothering Doris toward the—the end, but didn't know what it was. I suppose she was only disturbed about her sleep-walking."

"You knew about that?" he asked.

"I didn't see her doing it on the occasions when it happened, but heard the talk later. Ralph was upset. He is

rather puritanical, and the fact of her wandering about hotel corridors in only her nightgown disturbed him. He was quite upset also by her death."

"Was she attractive?" Tracy asked.

"Doris had a good figure, nice features, with dark eyes and hair, cut shorter than mine. We were about the same size. I suppose most men would have found her quite attractive."

Perhaps there had been a resemblance between the two women, as Tom had surmised. And, a disturbing thought, could this woman beside him know a great deal more of the occurrence at Kuantan than she was revealing, because she had been actively involved in it? But Tracy postponed thinking about this, remarking, "It seems odd there apparently was no man in her background."

"Odd? Must a woman necessarily have a man in her background?" Yolanda said. "There isn't one in mine."

She moved a little closer to him, almost imperceptibly, then continued, "I never heard her speak of a man—asked Mae about that later, and she said Doris had never mentioned anyone to her either. I can't recall she ever received any messages while we were traveling, but as I remarked before I didn't know her very well; we saw very little of each other. Ralph went through her things afterward. He said that he didn't find letters or names, or anything to connect her with anyone."

Yolanda put a hand on his arm. It could be, Tracy told himself, that she was adroitly emphasizing Cotter's statements. Perhaps she had been ordered to do so.

If she was really Yolanda Destin and was telling the truth, why had she been reluctant to join the trip around the world?

The pressure of the hand on his arm grew stronger. He was acutely conscious of her, of the sandalwood scent, of her nearness. It would have taken a colder-blooded man than Tracy Steele not to be aware of such things and to respond to them.

Yolanda said, "Remembering what happened in Malaya is terribly depressing. Can't we talk about something else?"

"Of course. What shall we talk about?"

"Well—why are we going to Kaneohe?"

"I must find and talk to someone," Tracy said. "It shouldn't take very long, probably only a few minutes. Then we'll drive back."

She smiled, showing an unexpected dimple. "And perhaps you'll pick up that rain-check and take me to dinner?"

Before he could respond she continued, looking ahead, "I don't think I have ever been up here before, and I can't say I am very fond of mountains. You have a great feeling for everything in the islands, though, don't you?"

"I didn't know it showed," he said.

"It does, quite strongly. But there's so much more of the world, too, so much to see and enjoy."

"I have seen a good deal of it," Tracy said. "I'll still take Hawaii."

"Perhaps you haven't seen the world on a de luxe level," Yolanda murmured. "That can be great fun, when there is no need to stint yourself on anything, with more than enough money to spend as you please."

He sent a startled glance at her. It seemed to him only one meaning could be read into the woman's words, that she was offering him the Destin fortune—along with herself.

What would be required of him in return?

He wondered, with a sense of excitement he could not repress. He wondered also if the time had come to hit hard at her with the questions which must be answered. If she was Yolanda Destin, in some great danger and asking only to be freed from it, with his reward the taking of what she had offered, then there should be a response to his demand that she must talk.

But—Milliama . . . he would wait until they faced Yolanda Destin's one-time nurse.

They were at the Pali and he was wheeling the car off the highway, stopping for a look at the view which in Tracy's opinion was one of the finest in Hawaii: the far sweep of mountains, a glimpse of the ocean and coral reefs, of the plains which had been battlefields in the islands' bloody past, and of the spreading rain forest here on this side of

the range where rainfall was measured in feet rather than inches.

There was the Pali itself also, the grim forbidding precipice with its sheer face, as though sliced by a gigantic knife. Kamehameha the Great had driven his enemies over it to destruction, the act which had won him control of the islands and which had established the dynasty of Hawaiian kings. Each time he saw the Pali anew, Tracy Steele almost could visualize that barbaric act. He had a great feeling also for Hawaiian history, a fact which amused Tom Lopaka, who had once remarked, "In spite of my island blood, you're more kamaaina than I am!"

Kamaaina—old-timer; Tracy had accepted the term as an accolade.

He said, "Shall we get out for a minute or so?"

Yolanda nodded. "If you wish." She opened the front door and slid from the car, then gasped as the wind hit her.

Tracy, absorbed in his thoughts, had not given heed to the wind. It always seemed to blow at the Pali, and today was nearly at gale force, hitting Yolanda, driving her several steps away from the car. Hair whipped about her face in a sable cloud as with both hands she frantically sought to restrain her skirt, which billowed high on shapely legs.

Tracy hurried around the car and helped her back in again. The wind hammered at him also; he had to lean against it, returning to slide under the wheel.

Yolanda, smoothing down her skirt, gasped, "For a second I thought it was going to snatch the clothes right off me!"

Tracy drove on, taking the old road down toward Kaneohe, a steep descent of numerous sharp switch-back curves, with precipitous drop-offs on either side.

Yolanda was busying herself with mirror and comb from her bag, rearranging her hair. There was silence between them; Tracy was concentrating on driving. He sensed that she was watching him sharply, appraisingly, in her mirror.

There had been little traffic up to the Pali. Now a rattle-

trap jalopy appeared in the rear-view mirror, appearing, disappearing, staying well behind.

Tracy stopped at a roadside store, as they reached the coastal plain. Its proprietor, an amiable Chinese with half a dozen children about him who showed a mixture of the Orient and Polynesia in their features, gave directions. Tracy turned off along a dirt road winding crookedly between almost solid walls of greenery, banks of giant ferns and clustering big-leaved ti trees, occasional patches of sugar cane and taro, with houses half-hidden from sight. Tracy kept count of those houses; he stopped presently at the sixth one on the right, veering from the highway into a slatternly yard and told Yolanda, "I'll check to see if this is the place."

It was. A ramshackle pick-up truck was parked in the yard, bearing a crookedly-lettered sign: *Mike Keoki, Hauling*.

The house was a frame shack, somewhat sway-backed, raised several feet above the ground. If it had ever been painted, no trace remained. On a wide front porch a fat, dark-skinned man was picking at a guitar and drinking beer. His thick black hair showed touches of gray, though his features were smooth and unlined.

Tracy approached him. "Are you Keoki? I'd like to speak to Milliama, your grandmother."

He offered his card, adding it was in connection with a case Hawaiian Eye was handling. The other turned the card between big blunt fingers without glancing at it, dark eyes intently sizing up Tracy Steele. From appearances he was wholly Hawaiian.

He put the guitar aside, stood and stretched, muttering, "Komo mai. Nou ke hale." It was the standard island phrase of politeness, meaning, "Come on in. The house is yours."

He pointed toward the front door with a thumb. "In there. I show you. Prob'ly won't do much good, but talk if you want to."

Tracy turned to beckon to Yolanda. The jalopy that had been following them down from the Pali clattered past the

Thunderbird and kept going. The day was growing dark, with clouds banking overhead.

Yolanda came hesitantly, teetering on her high heels. It had rained here earlier today and the yard was muddy. "Why do you want me with you?" she demanded.

He took her arm without replying, moving across the porch to where Keoki held a screen door open, and on inside to a front room with a haphazard collection of old furniture. Pictures, cut from magazines and newspapers, were pasted over every inch of wall space. A fat woman, wearing the garment now sold to haole tourists on Kalakaua Avenue as the muumuu, fled from them with a startled gasp, and disappeared.

Mike Keoki opened a door at the left. He gestured wordlessly. Still gripping Yolanda's arm, Tracy pushed her ahead of him into a small room.

The room was so small that it was crowded by an iron framed bed. It was occupied by a very thin, very fragile old woman whose hair was pure white. The impression Tracy instantly received was of life so wispy that it hung by a thread.

Yolanda stopped short. She shrank aside, back of hand to her mouth, staring. She whispered shakenly, "Who—who is that—?"

"Don't you know?" Tracy said.

Her back against a wall, she stood rigidly, bosom rising and falling with rapid, shallow inhalations of breath, fingertips pressed against her lips. She gasped, "Why did you bring me here?"

The eyes of the woman in the bed were fixed on them, but Tracy saw the blankness in those eyes, the total lack of any knowledgeable spark, and realized there was nothing to be learned in this place unless it could be forced from the one who called herself Yolanda Destin.

He said, "This is Milliama."

"Oh, God, no!" It was a whimpering cry of fright and protest; she turned and thrust at him blindly, pushing him aside. She squirmed through the door, too quickly for him to stop her, and ran across the front room, through the



screen door and into the open, slamming the screen door behind her.

Mike Keoki muttered, "She just real old, real tired. Milliamama not say much, any more. Not remember much either. Bimeby soon, I think, she be in heaven. Mo bettah for her."

Tracy said, "Aloha a nui, Milliamama." He backed from the room, in him the depressing realization of having drawn another blank. And the time which remained in which anything could be accomplished was running drastically short.

"Thanks," Tracy said to Mike Keoki and left the house also.

It was beginning to rain, with the wind rising, a clamorous rush of sound in the darkening afternoon. Yolanda was hurrying across the yard. She reached the road and crowded into the Thunderbird, on the driver's side. Tracy started after her, fine silvery droplets pelting him hard.

He had an awareness of someone running toward him in a crouch from his right, vanishing in a wind-whipped tangle of grotesquely huge ape-ape leaves. Tracy swung that way. In the roar of wind he did not hear the shot, or the whine of the bullet. He saw a hot red spark wink from the cover, and ran at it, realizing the other had a gun.

He plunged on. There was no weapon on him; he seldom carried one. The other shifted position, fired again and then was retreating. Tracy had one quick glimpse of him, no more; thought of George LaDew but shook his head, not quite sure. If it was LaDew he was not wearing a red shirt today.

Half a dozen steps into the rank jungle Tracy stopped, breathing hard. The ape-ape leaves beat at him like flailing elephant ears, writhing in torment before the rioting wind.

Tracy shook his head again and turned back. The rain was no more than a casual afternoon shower, typical of this side of the island, but promised to be a torrent before it ended. He reached the Thunderbird. Yolanda, hunched over the wheel, her features chalky in the unreal light, was gunning the motor hard. Apparently she had not noticed the two shots. Tracy glanced off along the road, thinking of the jalopy, but did not see it.

He slid in beside the woman. She let out the clutch and the car lurched forward with a violence which slammed him back against the seat cushion. A twist of the wheel turned them in a tight U-turn, sheets of muddy water flying high, then they were picking up speed, racing back in the direction from which they had come.

For a quarter of a mile the rain was a blinding flood against the windshield. Then it ceased abruptly. When they reached the highway the blacktop was gleamingly wet but the sun was shining. Minute particles of moisture in her hair glittered like chip diamonds.

They took the first of the switch-back curves, tires whining.

She said, husking the words, "Why did you do that to me?"

There was no chance for him to reply. She cried, "I told you to drop it, to stop prying! But you didn't!"

"I couldn't," he said. "And you must know why. You must have read the papers by now."

"I haven't!" she said.

"Then I'll tell you why I can't drop it. The man you saw in the reception room of our office was assaulted there, shortly after you had a glimpse of him. He died the following morning. This isn't a business now of just trying to find Mae Gamble. We're also hunting for a murderer."

Yolanda's eyes were wide and staring. They had a glassy look. "What does that have to do with me? I told you I had never seen him before in my life. I don't know anything about him!" She slapped the wheel in torment. "Why are you constantly trying to learn things from me that I don't know?"

The tires screamed again as they whipped into another curve. Tracy said, "Take it easy."

She gunned the car up a long slope. "Why did you make me go into that house?"

"Milliama was your nurse once," he said. "Remember?"

"I don't want to remember!" Yolanda cried.

"I told you to take it easy," Tracy said quietly. "Slow down."

She obeyed him to a certain extent, taking the next curve at an easier pace. And he continued, "Why don't you want to remember?"

"Never mind!" Then Yolanda added bitterly, "I didn't want to come back to Honolulu. I never should have done that."

"Why did you come back?" he demanded.

She refused to answer. The highway continued to climb. Before them an aureole of clouds hung over the Pali. Tracy noticed there was also a rainbow.

He said, "Did you hate Milliamas?"

"Of course not!"

The years could have changed her one-time nurse beyond the possibility of immediate recognition, Tracy told himself, so that Yolanda's failure to know her instantly might not be significant. But she had blindly thrust her way out of the room when he named Milliamas plainly, as though fearing the old woman might speak and betray her.

"You told me that you hated Manolo Fabregas," he reminded her.

"Yes. He mistreated my pony, Buttons."

"What happened to Manolo?" Tracy asked.

She shrugged. "How should I know? My mother paid the servants off and we went away. He must have left the islands also."

"What reason do you have for thinking that he left the islands?"

"I don't have any reason; I don't know or care what he did! Stop nagging at me!"

Tracy shook his head. "I can't stop."

She slanted a harried sideward look at him. "You are going to keep on prying—?"

"I've already told you, Yolanda, that I must."

She cried, "No!" Then she rammed the accelerator to the floor as they went into a wickedly short S-curve.

The car yawed inexorably to the right, pulled by centrifugal force, skidding, sliding. Tracy was slammed hard one way and then the other, a chilling sense in him of the tires spinning on the narrow dirt shoulder beside the highway, of the Thunderbird hovering for a split second at the

edge of disaster, a drop below him of several hundred feet almost straight down.

The car clawed away from that somehow, but was instantly into the reverse curve. Yolanda whipped the wheel, adding to a skidding drift across the blacktop toward another drop-off, now on her side. The tires screamed in a crescendo of protest. Her face was a frozen mask; she was, Tracy thought, in the fleeting instant when it seemed again they must go over, deaf and blind to everything save some mad command within herself which she could not ignore.

He snatched at the wheel, putting his strength into it, pushing, attempting to reverse the drift of the car. It fought him, but the tortured rig, clawing once more away from the shoulder with dirt flying high, slid across the highway, rear end first, and slammed into a bank which thankfully was located on the inner side of the second curve. It struck with a jolting force which slammed Tracy at the dashboard. He managed to get his arm up quickly enough to shield his face.

Reaction hurled him back against the cushion. Then he leaned quickly to twist the key and jerk it from the ignition lock.

Yolanda had been driven hard against the wheel, then thrown back also. She huddled there, shivering, for a second, before thrusting the door open and wriggling out. She ran, angling back across the highway.

Tracy went after her. The wind was violent here, as at the Pali, and blew her skirt flying high, but she ignored this now. She was at the edge of the shoulder, two hundred feet at least of empty space below—to leap, perhaps—when Tracy caught her from behind.

She fought him wildly, with clawing nails and then with pummeling fists as she tried to break away. They lurched about together in the dirt, the sun bright and hot, the wind buffeting them. Madness was in her still.

"Stop it!" Tracy shouted, the words torn roughly from his lips by the wind. He shook the woman hard, hands digging into her shoulders.

He had an awareness again of wide, staring eyes. They were suddenly tear-blinded. She began to sob violently,

straining against him, quivering as though in the grip of a hard chill, wind whipping about her face. Her lips, wet from streaming tears, covered his. She writhed against him in an excess of emotion, with an almost wordless whimpering that was wrenched from a throat where the cords were tight and distended.

Tracy held her, gently now, trying to reach an explanation of what she had done.

He remembered Greg MacKenzie's mention of a suicide attempt involving sleeping pills. Was that enough to reach a conclusion that the woman he held was in truth Yolanda Destin?

Her storm of emotion ran its course. She stood with head lowered, looking at the ground, in a state of lax indifference now. The pride of bearing, the sensuous knowledge of her own beauty, were gone. When Tracy turned her toward the car she accepted this without comment.

He helped her in on the off side and went around to slide under the wheel.

Arms crossed, huddled against the door, she stared straight ahead. "We'll go on now," Tracy said.

She glanced to him for a moment, eyes remote, dull, in contrast to their usual flashing brilliance. In the aftermath of her emotional outburst she was withdrawing, retreating from him and from everything. She hated and feared reality.

Yolanda said, "Take me to the house. And don't ask me anything more, because I won't answer you, not ever again."

## Twelve

Tracy did as she asked, making the run quickly down Nuuanu Avenue from the Pali. Approaching the side road, she broke her stony silence to say, "Stop. I'll get out."

He applied the brakes. "Yolanda, this is your car," he reminded her.

"Keep it," she said, getting out. "Turn it in for me. I left a deposit which ought to cover everything. But if not"—she dug into her purse and tossed some bills onto the seat—"use this."

She walked away unsteadily, heading along the side road toward the house. Tracy looked after her; he looked at the money she had indifferently dropped, three one-hundred-dollar bills. He shook his head, shifted gears and drove on.

There was a sense in him of having accomplished nothing from this day's activities, of being at dead center on the case, stalled. This was not unusual. He had experienced it before on other cases.

There were ways of coping with such a situation. One of them was to wait and hope for a break; Danny Quon had once dryly remarked that some cases solved themselves if only left alone. But the time element in this one forbade any waiting.

Another way was to drive hard and attempt to force a break. Should he have done that with Yolanda Destin instead of letting her leave him, with questions hammered until she had to answer? Tracy thought not. The woman had been almost at a breaking point; she might not have been able to take any more pressure. Perhaps later there

would be another, better time to approach her again, in spite of her statement that she was through talking to him. But—later? Again he felt the pressure of time. Quon had said it, if Cotter decided to leave the islands, taking the woman with him, there was nothing anybody could do to stop him.

Who was she? Could this be the key question whose answer would make everything clear? Tracy stopped at a service station and dialed Quon's number. The day was now nearing its close. He was hopeful there had been a response to the request for a Washington check on Yolanda Destin.

The reply was negative. "They get a lot of such requests. Maybe we'll have an answer by tomorrow—though I'm not sure what we can do even if they send us something," Quon said. "Picking up a set of her prints for comparison could be a pretty tricky business."

"Did you ask for a check on Doris Varney also?" Tracy asked.

"Of course. Now, what did you come up with at Kaneohe?"

Tracy told him.

"A handful of nothing," he said in summation, "unless that bit of wild driving on her part, and her show of hysterics, might mean something. I'm not sure."

"Could she have been putting it all on, with the knowledge Yolanda Destin had a record of reckless driving and unstable behavior?" Quon wondered.

"If that is what happened, she made it too real for comfort," Tracy said wryly.

"And you can't give me a make on the guy you say slung a couple of bullets at you?"

"No. It's only a guess on my part that he was George LaDew."

"Well, it happened outside of my jurisdiction, of course," Quon said. "But he'll undoubtedly show up here again and we'll run across him. I'm doubting now that he can tell us anything more about Mae Gamble, however, since he seems to be spending all of his time trying to get even with you."

The lieutenant sighed then, and went on, "I'm cross-

eyed from reading reports which leave me with a handful of nothing, too. I suppose we'll have to keep digging though."

Danny Quon was stuck at dead center also.

Tracy drove on. A jet liner passed overhead, making its approach to the airport. He thought of Greg MacKenzie, wondering if Greg was now on his way to Honolulu.

He was on Ala Moana again, stopping at a red light, shifting, starting to move on, when Tracy heard his name called. He toed the brake. Cricket came darting through traffic and crowded in beside him. "My goodness, you must be getting hard of hearing," she said breathlessly. "I've been running after you, and yelling, and waving my arms, for literally blocks!"

"Sorry. I was thinking hard about something," he apologized. "Want me to take you to the hotel?"

She said, "Where did you get this T-bird?" Then, hurrying on, answering his question, "No. I want to go to the yacht harbor—that is, I do if you want to go there also after hearing something that I'm going to tell you."

Tracy's brows lifted. "Something? And the yacht harbor? Cricket, what have you been up to now?"

She said, eyes lowered, fingering a pleat in knee-length white sharkskin shorts, "I was there for a couple of hours with—well, the gentleman from Texas I told you about. He is talking of buying a schooner and making a trip to Tahiti—"

"Now see here!" Tracy interrupted. "You aren't going off to Tahiti! I don't care if that guy has half the bucks in Texas and is dangling all of them under your nose—"

"Oh, stop it!" Cricket cried. "Of course I'm not going to Tahiti or anywhere else, but I couldn't see any harm in looking at a schooner with him. And what I'm going to tell you doesn't have anything to do with that. I saw the man with the cane again, the one who was in the lounge two nights ago with that—that woman."

Tracy veered quickly to a curb and stopped. "He was at the yacht harbor this afternoon?"

"Yes. And I found out why," Cricket replied. "He has chartered the *Trident*."



Tracy's lips rounded in a startled, soundless whistle. This could be the break in the case, but it was not favorable—decidedly the contrary, he thought, with a sense of dismay.

"You told me to stay out of whatever it is that you're doing, and I tried to, honestly," Cricket said. "But when I saw him, I couldn't help finding out what he was doing there."

"Lover, I'm very glad you did," Tracy told her gruffly.

He shifted gears and drove on, presently making the turn off Ala Moana toward the yacht harbor, located just north of the Hawaiian Village. It was a pretty sight in the late afternoon sun, boats crowding the various basins, a scene given counterpoint by an aircraft carrier in the near distance, as enormous as a floating mountain, bound out from Pearl Harbor with a scurrying covey of attendant destroyers.

Tracy had a deep feeling for boats. Tucked away at the apartment were plans for a fifty-foot ketch he hoped to build some day. At the moment, however, his sole concern was to find the vessel which Cricket had mentioned.

It was moored at the oil dock, taking on fuel. Tracy was familiar with the *Trident*, a diesel cruiser about eighty feet over-all in length. He knew its charter rate, two hundred dollars a day. He also knew it was a deep-water craft, capable of going anywhere. This was the boat that Ralph Cotter was planning to use, if Cricket was right.

She left the Thunderbird with him, a hand to a bright yellow scarf bound about her hair which was flying like a banner; the wind was strong here also. And Cricket giggled suddenly. "That man from Texas must have thought I had flipped my lid when I suddenly ran off from him the way I did!" she said.

The *Trident's* owner—and captain—was not hard to locate, nor was he, pleased by the deal he had made with Cotter, reluctant to talk. The charter, he told Tracy, was for five days with provision for renewal, and it seemed usage of the craft would be made beyond those five days, since Cotter had told him to see to it full stores were taken aboard, with the oil tanks topped off.

"Said he wanted to go around by Kailua Bay first, then

off to Molokai and Maui, that he's got in mind maybe making a tour of the islands," the captain confided. "Said also there might be some additional passengers besides himself. It's all right with me; I can handle up to twelve."

Kailua Bay; a passenger might be coming aboard there also, Tracy thought—and if not at Kailua there were other inlets, many of them, around the Oahu coastline where somebody might slip quietly aboard the *Trident*. Somebody named Mae Gamble—?

Tracy said, "When is he planning to leave?"

"Maybe tonight, maybe tomorrow morning. There are some trunks to come aboard first. They haven't showed up yet."

The trunks containing the papers found in the Destin house attic? If so, it seemed likely Cotter was preparing to quit Honolulu for good, with an order for course to be altered once the *Trident* was at sea. The craft was quite capable of making it to the mainland. At two hundred dollars a day for every day the *Trident* was away from its home port, there was not likely to be any objection.

Could Cotter be stopped from leaving? Danny Quon had already given the answer to that. Taking him in on suspicion alone would only delay him briefly. Without some definite link tying Cotter or Yolanda to Burrell's death, they could not be stopped from departing from the islands.

Tracy found a dock phone and called police headquarters. Quon was out and could not be reached. He left a report for the lieutenant. Then he headed for the hotel with Cricket, both of them now silent.

He was aware of something that was new in their relationship—stiffness, constraint, a lack of their usual camaraderie. Cricket was aware of it also, he thought. For her, the shadow of Yolanda Destin was between them. Tracy wanted to tell Cricket there was no need for her to think this, that she was wrong and nothing had changed. But he found himself wondering, with a sense of some confusion, whether she was so wrong after all.

He wheeled the Thunderbird in at the curb in front of the office. Cricket murmured, "I'll be wearing a new dress tonight. I—I hope you can stop by to see it—?"

The question passed over his head. He was suddenly deep in thought, the wheels and gears of his mental processes taking command, whirling almost with the audible clicking of a computer in a sorting out and setting in place of all the bits and pieces of what had occurred. Time was really running out now. A pattern had to be found, buttressed by logic, in a hurry.

Cricket left him, head down, almost running.

Tracy left the car also after a bit, and went into the office.

Tom was out, with no message left in Irene Ling's keeping.

Tracy went on to his own apartment, cleaned up, made himself a drink but then put it aside, untasted. He settled at the divan and began to chain-smoke, lost again in deep thought. Twilight crept into the place, followed by early darkness.

All the facts were in, he told himself, all the jigsaw pieces. They had to be put together. The true picture had to be found before it was too late.

And the picture he sought began to emerge. He tested it from a dozen angles; it stood up. He began to see quite clearly what must have occurred, step by step, in sequence.

Some conclusions also began to be apparent.

Mae Gamble, he told himself, was still alive and in hiding, still greedily trying to collect from her blackmail scheme. There were a number of reasons to sustain this. Cotter's chartering of the *Trident* was the final and most conclusive of these reasons. If Mae were not alive, Tracy thought, he would not have any need for the boat. Cotter required it as his means of finally getting rid of her. If Mae went aboard the *Trident* she would probably go over the side by night and disappear in deep water.

Where was she now? The answer to this was a piece missing from the emerging picture.

It was not the only one. Perhaps it was not the most important piece. Another, bothering Tracy even more, was the explanation for the behavior of the woman whom he knew as Yolanda Destin.

Like Mae Gamble, she knew something. Did they share the same secret? Tracy doubted this, though he could not define to himself the reason for his doubt. He groped for an explanation of Yolanda's anguish and fear, her behavior today, and had a frustrating sense of it being just beyond his fingertips.

He stood up, somewhat stiff, and stretched, with a realization of being hungry. He went out, around the pool and into his office where a light was on at his desk. There Tracy discovered that Tom had left him a note, with no indication when it had been written: *I found something we overlooked before. Take a look at the film-strip I checked.*

Tracy reached for the magnifying glass. Tom had marked one of the pictures with a red pencil. It was not one of those which included Burrell, probably the reason it had received only cursory attention before. Tom, in his thorough fashion, must have gone over all of them again. And Tracy, examining the picture in question, grunted hard.

It was a shot which included a segment of chain-link fence in the background. Beyond the fence the figure of a man was visible, leaning on a cane.

Cotter? The figure was too indistinct to make an identification; even if blown up a hundred times it would still be too indistinct for that, Tracy thought. But he was certain in his own mind that Cotter had been at the airport, had seen Burrell arrive, then had hurried away ahead of him, his destination this office.

So there was evidence now linking the two men, certain in Tracy's opinion though he realized it would not stand up for a moment in court. A good deal more was needed. There was nothing yet to place Cotter here. Only Mae Gamble could do that.

Tracy continued to study the picture, thinking now of Tom Lopaka, of the action Tom might have taken after discovering it. He remembered Tom's stubborn belief that there was something at the Destin house which had been overlooked. Hard on this was remembrance also of Tom's reference to the shallow cellar there.

Tracy unlocked the bottom drawer of his desk and

brought out a Police Positive .38. Carrying a gun seemed advisable in what he meant to do now.

Moke was out of the office, making his nightly patrol check. One of the hotel guards was holding down the receptionist's desk for him. There was still no message there for Tracy, who went through the lobby, with its dinner hour crowd, and down to the garage.

His Chrysler was not in its space.

The night man did not know when it had left. "A lot of traffic at this hour, people going various places for the evening," he said. "It's just not possible to keep track of all cars, in and out."

Tracy recalled then that Tom had spoken of garaging his own Buick for repairs before leaving on the trip to Maui. It seemed likely that the work was still going on, and that Tom had taken the Chrysler in a hurry, or he would have left some word. Each of them had keys to the other's car.

Tracy doubled back to the reception room again.

Moke was still out. With no way to report in, which would have been the case if he had the radio-equipped Chrysler, Tracy debated over leaving word where he was going. If Quon checked and picked that up, his reaction could be explosive. The lieutenant might try to block him. Glancing to the clock, now close on to eight, Tracy hurriedly scribbled a note of explanation and sealed it in an envelope, adding instructions on the outside for Moke to open the envelope and notify Quon of its contents if there was no word from him by eleven.

He went then into the office once more, this time to pick up a flashlight.

His phone rang.

The voice that reached his ear was husky, uncertain, thickened as though from weeping: "Tracy, I won't be seeing you again. I want to say that I'm sorry for what I've done, for everything. . . ."

The voice trailed off. He said, "Yolanda, where are you?"

"At the house—"

She was silent again. The connection had not been broken, though. Tracy gripped his phone hard, as though

by force of will to hold her on the wire. "Don't hang up! Talk to me!"

But, with no further word, she did hang up.

He hurried through the reception room, out to the street. Kim, leaning against a fender of his cab, offered an eager hello. Tracy did not reply. He shoved himself under the wheel of the Thunderbird and began to drive.

In the big front room at the Destin house, Cotter studied the bare space on the wall where the portrait of Roger Destin had hung. It had gone with the trunks of papers in a van to the yacht harbor just before dark. The portrait would appear as a color plate frontispiece in his book, Cotter thought pleasurably.

Then he turned to George LaDew, standing nearby. "I told you to follow my cousin this afternoon and report to me where she went. Nothing was said about making a try at Tracy Steele!"

LaDew's rubbery features set mutinously. "Listen, I owe him and that sidekick of his something. Both of them hung sneak punches on me. I saw a chance to sling a couple of bullets at him. I took it!"

"And missed!" Cotter said. "How long would it have taken for him to beat out of you everything you knew, if he had caught you? Not very long, I'm thinking. You should have taken more care not to miss. . . . Now, we come to what I want done tonight."

"You had better show me some dough before I do anything," LaDew muttered. "So far it's been all talk and no pay."

Cotter nodded. He produced a thick wad of bills, detached several, balled them up and flipped them to LaDew, who made a hurried catch, read the numbers on them and grinned excitedly. "Mister, for some more like these I'm ready to take any orders you want to dish out!" he exclaimed.

"Good," Cotter said. "You are to go and check whether this place is being watched. If it is, and they are police, report back to me at once. If it isn't, keep moving about with your eyes open. It may be that one or more of those

private investigators will come prowling around. If that should happen—”

He paused. LaDew said, “Yeah? Go on!”

Cotter did not respond. His glance was hard and penetrating, his mouth tightly set. And after a moment LaDew grinned. “I get you!” he said. “Don’t worry about a thing; if they do come snooping, they’ll damned well wish they hadn’t!”

Cotter said, “Leave by the front door and turn the lights off as you go. I want to rest my eyes for a few moments.”

“Okay,” LaDew said. But he hesitated, hand to light switch. “I’m sure curious about where you’ve got Mae. Is she stashed here some place, maybe—?”

Then he shook his head, before Cotter could respond. “So that might be it, but why should I care? You just keep the dough coming and I’ll forget all about her!”

The lights clicked off. The door closed. Cotter settled himself in the leather armchair and relaxed, checking his moves.

McLarnin had been nudged—no difficult feat—into going to town tonight. He had orders to close the house again tomorrow. Aponi, the big dimwit, was out back somewhere.

Cotter himself meant to handle the sealing up of the cellar again; he had procured the items for that this afternoon.

The woman was above stairs, packing. She had been told they were leaving tonight. After the telephone call for which he must wait, they would drive down to Honolulu, leave the Cadillac on a side street, take a taxi to the yacht harbor and go aboard the *Trident*.

He would give orders to get under way at once. Afterward, the rest would all work out. The planning was sound. As for the police and Hawaiian Eye, they had nothing that could be used to stop him. They were never going to have anything.

He rubbed his leg, which was beginning to ache. It brought back memories of the laughter. He swore grittily, telling himself he must forget it.

There was something which should help him do that, something that was going to be handed to him before he

left this place. He had been put off long enough. If he was opposed again, if the woman upstairs tried again to evade what he wanted and meant to have from her tonight—

Cotter gripped his cane fiercely for a second, thinking of this possibility, but then grunted and relaxed. She would not oppose him. The fear in her had become too great. She would capitulate.

Tracy Steele left the Thunderbird at the highway and approached on the side road. He did not see his Chrysler.

The house seemed completely dark tonight. For a moment he thought they might have left. But, working with care and quiet along the drive, he saw the Cadillac under the porte-cochere and also discerned a glimmer of light at a second-floor window, probably Yolanda's room.

He came to the cellar doors where the hasp had been pried away. The doors were still open. Tracy noticed another glimmer of light, moving about, off to one side at the carriage house or near it—made by Aponi or McLarnin, he thought.

He went down cement steps into the shallow cellar, switched on his flash and began to search about.

The discovery of what he had more than half expected to find was made with surprising quickness, so much so that it bothered him. Over at one side, near a wall, there was a trap door, flush with the floor, hinges almost hidden under a wall overhang, an inset ringbolt for lifting it.

There were two barrels, full of trash, at one side of the trap door. Had they covered it when the search had been made earlier today? Tracy tried to remember, and could not. Only a cursory look had been given to this place, for visible evidence that Mae Gamble was not here. Still, he switched off the light and waited for several dragging moments, listening hard, with the thought that it could have been exposed as bait to snare him.

He heard no sound anywhere, no stir of motion. Tracy switched on the flash again and lifted the trap door.

There were wooden risers and wooden steps below. The shallow cellar was a blind, concealing another one under it.

Tracy hesitated again. Where was Tom Lopaka?



No answer came. Tracy went down the wooden steps, flash in one hand and the .38 in the other, its hammer eared back.

The subcellar was deeper than the one above, with dirt walls and flooring, but also with many wooden shoring beams which cast thick shadows. At first glance, with a quick sweep of the flash, there seemed to be nothing at all here, no reason to explain why the subcellar had been dug.

Then Tracy noticed something on his left, a scattered pile of what seemed to be small wooden tubs. He moved to take a look at them. They showed Chinese lettering on the sides.

Tracy dropped to one knee for a closer look.

A grunt came from behind him, and a pattering rush of footsteps. He tried to throw himself sideways, to swing the gun around, but was too late. His move saved him from worse than what ensued, however; metal chunked against his temple and the side of his face, with an instant of blinding pain, instead of solidly skulling him.

The blow was bad enough though. He was on his side in the dirt, dazed but not quite out. Then a heel hammered his ribs, stomping him, and there was a gusty laugh of derision.

"You and your sidekick are real stupes; both of you walked right into it!" George LaDew said. He bent to scoop up the flashlight and the .38. "Is anybody else with you? I'll go take a look. You stay put." He laughed and stomped Tracy's ribs again. "Just stay put!"

He scrambled up the wooden steps. The trap door slammed shut. A grinding sound followed briefly, then a heavy thump.

Tracy struggled to his feet, in solid blackness. He was short of breath, and pain in his side hinted that a rib might be cracked. But he fumbled his way to the steps, and up them. He put his hands to the trap door and pushed. It did not give even a fraction of an inch. Some solid weight was covering it now.

A mutter of sound came from somewhere below, a slurred, foggy mumble of words. Tracy brought out his cigarette lighter and snapped it, going down the steps again.

The small, wavering circle of flame showed him Tom Lopaka, struggling to his feet also. He had been off at one side, hidden by the supporting beams. A spiderweb of blood showed on Tom's right cheek. Its source was a scalp cut. Tracy went quickly to put an arm about him, but Tom shook his head impatiently. He spoke again, distinctly now, "Must have been out for a while. I'm okay except for a king-sized headache. What's the score, Tracy?"

"We're in the place that we both guessed must be here," Tracy said. "It looks like the general idea is that here we are going to remain."

He let the lighter flicker out. Darkness closed in, thick and impenetrable.

## Thirteen

Tom Lopaka had discovered the man with the cane on the film-strip and had written the note to Tracy shortly before five. Then Kim had reported in with what had seemed a hot lead, a line on a man who claimed he had seen someone going into the Hawaiian Eye office on the afternoon of Burrell's assault.

"It was a washout, though, a guy who was willing to say anything if somebody would hand him a couple of bucks," Tom said.

Past seven, and after a hamburger and some coffee, he had returned to the hotel, there to pick up Tracy's Chrysler, since his Buick was unavailable, with the determination to take another look at the Destin cellar.

"I felt something like this place had to be here," Tom explained. "I also knew Quon would order me to lay off if I told him I was going to take another look. I glanced in at the office, but the guy spelling Moke said he hadn't seen you; I decided to come ahead, make a quick check and then call both of you if I found anything."

He had left the Chrysler about fifty yards north of the side road, parked well off the highway, had stalked the house and grounds with care before entering the upper cellar. There had been a light in the front room of the house then, Tom reported.

He had searched the upper cellar, shifting trash, hunting—and had found the trap door, after moving the two barrels, which were as heavy as though they were loaded with scrap iron.

The trap door had been nailed shut, with the nails bent, as though the person who had done the nailing had been in a hurry.

"Here's an odd thing now," Tom said. "I looked around and found a rusty clawhammer nearby on a joist. Do you suppose it had been used to drive those nails and then was just left there? Anyway, I pulled them out and got the trap door open. That's the last I remember. I must have been creamed and dumped in here head-first; at least, that's the way I feel! Somebody must have come in after me, from outside, probably barefooted since I didn't hear a whisper."

"I played it like a chucklehead," Tracy muttered. "It seemed to me that trap door couldn't have been so visible when we were up here before with Quon, but I wasn't sure. And I was watching for somebody who might try to come in behind me. I just didn't stop to think that he might be down here waiting, with the notion that since he had bagged you there was a good possibility I would be coming along also."

"He?" Tom said. "Can you be more specific?"

"George LaDew. And barefooted, as you guessed, with feet like cement blocks. I got one of them in my ribs twice."

"He's playing on Cotter's side now?" Tom said. "There might be some significance in that, considering his past relationship with Mae Gamble. She might have steered him to Cotter. Speaking of her, is there any sign of the lady here?"

"Not from a look I had before he jumped me. I suppose we might as well check the place thoroughly, though."

He snapped the cigarette lighter again. Using its flame, they had a look at the subcellar. Not much of a look was necessary. Tracy said, moments later. "There is no sign she was ever here."

Tom nodded in agreement. "I've been looking at the ground, thinking possibly there might be a grave, but don't see any sign of that either."

Tracy grunted, looking toward the steps leading up. Some loose dirt seemed to be scattered around, just beyond

it. The thought was in him for a second that possibly, just possibly, a grave might have been dug with dirt scattered about so that no mound would show.

But Tom, continuing, said, "Those nails I pulled from the trapdoor were rusty, also. Tracy, I'm of the opinion there just hasn't been anybody at all down here for years. It certainly smells like it!"

Tracy agreed with this. The subcellar had the musty dankness of a crypt.

He said, "What in the devil is the meaning of this place? Why were two cellars dug when the house was built?"

Tom, scrubbing at his face with a handkerchief, said, "Put your light over here."

He had found the wooden tubs, knelt to them and examined a thin dark rime coating the interior of one. Tom scraped at it, tasted carefully and made a wry face. "Opium," he said. "Very old. I think it's your answer, Tracy."

"Somebody was dealing in junk—?"

Tom nodded. "Old Roger, for a guess. It could be the way he actually founded the family fortune, with this subcellar dug to store shipments as they came in on his ships from China. The large Chinese population of the islands at that time could have made opium very profitable. And it could explain the barrels over the trap door, the trap door itself nailed shut, the padlock on the outside doors of the upper cellar and the bricked-over door leading into that from the house. The later Destinys wanted to hide and forget the whole setup."

"Why leave these tubs here, if all that is true?" Tracy wondered.

"Why not? Or maybe they were just overlooked. I'd lay odds that is the reason why two cellars were dug."

And all these years later, Tracy thought, they had served to booby-trap himself and Tom Lopaka. He had felt certain, upon finding this place, that the answer to Mae Gamble's disappearance had been uncovered. Tom had probably felt the same way. Instead, they had come up with nothing, as before.

The lighter was sputtering, dying; Tracy tilted it, in an

effort to feed more fuel to the wick, but its flame pinched out. He snapped it several times, to no avail.

"Tom, I'm out of matches," he said. "If you aren't fixed with something to make a light, we're in the dark."

"In more ways than one," Tom observed ruefully, and searched his pockets. He reported, "No matches on me. No lighter, either. Our friend LaDew must have taken it, along with everything else he could lift."

"Including a gun—?"

"Including a gun," Tom said. "I felt the time was right to start packing one."

They stood for a moment in silence. Then Tom continued, "This caper tonight by LaDew doesn't seem to make much sense. With nothing to be found down here, aside from a possible family secret whose disclosure would mean nothing now, why didn't they let us just poke around and then go away?"

"No telling," Tracy said. "It might have been LaDew's own idea to jump us. If so, it plays right into Cotter's hands though."

He told of the chartering of the *Trident*. Tom whistled softly. "So Cotter might pull out, leaving us here?" he asked.

"Perhaps," Tracy answered.

"What are the chances of Danny Quon coming along to shake us loose?"

"I'm not sure." Tracy told then of leaving the note for Moke, but added, "It's no guarantee Danny will come here, however, even after Moke passes the information along. You heard Danny this afternoon; he stuck his neck out, asking for the search warrant, and wasn't inclined to do such a thing again. He may not decide to move until tomorrow morning, when we turn up missing."

"I don't think I would care to stay here until tomorrow morning," Tom remarked thoughtfully. "In fact, aside from the fact I'm beginning to feel a touch of claustrophobia from being in this hole, I don't care much for the idea of staying here, period. George LaDew may be back with additional unpleasant plans for us."

"With guns on him, and no love for us two," Tracy

said. "It could happen rather soon. When he left, LaDew remarked that he was going to check for anyone else who might have been with us. That shouldn't take very long."

"Such being the case," Tom said, "I am of the opinion we should get out of here with no delay."

"I'm with you, buddy," Tracy said. "But—how? There's only one way out, the trap door. I tried it. LaDew must have shoved those two barrels over it again. It won't budge."

"Let's give it a try together," Tom said.

They groped their way to the steps and up them. There was barely room enough to stand side by side. Tom got a shoulder under the trap door, and grunted with effort, lifting experimentally. Tracy added his strength. It seemed to him nothing happened.

"Those barrels are heavy as sin," Tom muttered. "I think we shifted them just a little though. Tracy, duck your head and get your back into it. I'll do the same. Then, when I give the word, we'll put out all we've got."

"Okay," Tracy responded. "Call it!"

"One—two—three . . . heaven!" Tom said.

They expended muscle-cracking effort.

Tom Lopaka, a devotee of weight-lifting, was capable of prodigious and at times almost unbelievable feats of strength. Tracy Steele accounted himself no weakling. He put everything he had into the effort—or so it seemed to him at least—and he knew Tom was doing the same. But it was not enough.

"Don't let up!" Tom gasped. "Again—heaven!"

"It's no good!" Tracy wheezed.

He had to quit, muscles quivering from strain, a sense of sweat slicking his body.

Tom grudgingly let up also, breathing hard. "We'll rest a couple of seconds and try again," he muttered. "Look, when we do get out, what's our next move?"

It was wholly characteristic of Tom Lopaka that he said "when" and not "if." Tracy replied, "You hustle to the Chrysler and get word through to Quon; he can act against LaDew, and with pressure on him we ought to learn something. That LaDew is here indicates he either is working

with Mae Gamble or she tipped part of her hand to him, with some mention of Cotter. Maybe she mentioned a good deal. We want to know everything LaDew knows!"

"Okay, I'll get word to Quon," Tom agreed. "What will you be doing?"

"I'm going to find Yolanda. We're running out of time, and she's got to talk also. I thought I could force her to it this afternoon, but drew a blank—"

He told hurriedly of the trip to Kaneohe.

Tom caught the implication in the near-disastrous incident on the highway. "Does that indicate she is really Yolanda Destin? But if so, and she can blow the whistle on Cotter, why is she holding back? It would be her chance to be rid of the guy. There certainly is no liking between them. Is she too afraid of him to talk?"

"Of him or of something," Tracy said. "If I can only find what it is—"

"You might be wishing you hadn't," Tom said. "One very good reason could be that she was the one primarily involved in what happened in Malaya, or that she was hand-in-glove with Cotter and both of them are equally guilty."

There was an unspoken question in Tom's words: Had matters proceeded so far between Tracy Steele and the woman that he might shy away from implicating her if it became clear that she was guilty of murder?

Tracy shook his head, no. Matters could never reach that point. If Tom's chilling speculation was correct, and logic was beginning to say strongly that it was—what other reason could there be for her fear?—Tracy would have to move against her.

"Let's try that trap door again," Tom said. "And this time we're going to make it!"

They set themselves anew, shoulders to wood, bodies bowed, feet braced on the narrow steps. They began to lift.

Once more, Tracy expended every ounce of strength that was in him. He knew Tom was doing the same. But again there was no result.

"More!" Tom Lopaka croaked indomitably.



It was his way, a determined, unrelenting purpose which Tom applied to any project he tackled. He was reaching deep, to the utmost reserve of stamina, pouring it out prodigally.

"Don't—quit!" Tom gasped.

This admonition was not necessary. If he quit now, Tracy knew, he was finished; he could never force himself to such an effort again. They would be prisoners in this dank, evil-smelling hole.

The trap door gave a little, with a groaning sound.

Tracy gritted his teeth harder, breath held in burning lungs. He sought one additional ounce of energy. Tom, crowded against him, did the same.

The barrels toppled, with what seemed a thunderous crash. The trap door flew open, hammering against the wall. They burst through it with a frantic desire for freedom, like hares fleeing a suddenly opened trap.

Tracy took two lunging steps, then dropped to one knee, head down, sucking air in wheezing gulps, feeling for a moment completely spent. Tom was beside him, still standing, but with feet wide-spread. He muttered, "Now that we did it, I don't believe it!"

Tracy came to his feet. "We're not out of this yet!"

He was remembering the outer doors of the upper cellar, the only way to reach the open. If LaDew had closed and barred them, if their wrenching effort had been in vain—

But he saw they still stood open, with faint night-light sifting in, enough of it to outline Tom Lopaka's shadowy figure.

Tom started toward those doors. But Tracy hesitated. From nowhere, he remembered something about this place they were now in. "Tom, you're going to have to revise the guess you made down below," he said. "This cellar, at least, was used well after Roger Destin's time. I saw a newspaper up here this afternoon that had a 1947 dateline."

"So—?" Tom said.

"So when was the subcellar's trap door nailed shut and this cellar sealed off—and why?"

"I don't know, and I would prefer to guess about it

later," Tom said. "For God's sake, Tracy, let's get out of here!"

He started toward the doors again. But the delay had been a second or so too long. Light suddenly flashed there, spreading, light from a small lantern held by someone coming in, someone who had to bend, hunching down, creating the shadow-illusion of a monstrous, shuffling frog.

Tom stopped abruptly. "Auwe!" he breathed. "What, in the name of all that's holy, is *that*?"

"It's Aleki Aponi," Tracy breathed in response. "Let me handle him, Tom—if he can be handled."

He took two careful steps toward the big man, who had stopped at the bottom of the cellar steps, barring the way in. Tom said conversationally, "Hello, Aponi. We were just leaving."

The thin, high-pitched voice said, "I hear noise, come to look. What you do here?"

"Let's go outside," Tracy proposed. "We'll explain it to you there, aikane."

"No," Aponi said. "I think mo bettah you stay here while I call for boss."

"Remember what Lieutenant Quon said," Tracy reminded him sternly. "Cause any more trouble, you land in jail. Now let us out of here!"

Aponi shuffled his feet uneasily. "Aoeli-hiki. No can do," he said. "This only nice place I ever find. People leave me alone. I get plenty to eat. And boss not like for you to be here. So you stay. I call him."

He moved back a step, the lantern lifted, illuminating the puckered seams, worried but resolute, of his broad, flat face.

"Tracy, talking is no good," Tom muttered. "We've got to take him, and do it quick. Hit him from your side. I'll go in from mine."

He was right, Tracy realized. They had no choice, had to take him and do it before George LaDew returned—or before Cotter himself appeared, brought by the crash of those toppling barrels.

Tracy felt dubious about their ability to do it. His lungs

were still burning, there was a knife-edge of pain in his side, and his face felt as though it had been caught in a meat-grinder. Tom, he thought, was in no better state.

But Tom said, "Now!" and they moved together.

Tracy drove in from Aponi's right. The big man dropped the lantern and swung an arm at him. Tracy tried to duck under it, but his reflexes were slow. The forearm cracked into his forehead, and his feet shot from under him. He hit the cellar floor on his back, so joltingly that it seemed to Tracy he bounced.

Tom Lopaka had driven in from Aponi's left, grabbing his arm with both hands, whipping and twisting. Aponi swung that arm also. Tom was hurled against a wall with a crash which seemed to shake the whole house.

Aponi turned then and started out. Tracy had rolled, was up on his hands and knees. He threw himself across the giant's massive thighs. Aponi did not go down, but he was driven sideways. Then Tom was on him again, leaping from behind, coiling an arm about his neck, trying for a stranglehold.

The lantern, on the floor, weakly lighted the scene in an eerie fashion. Shadows danced about the walls and on the cellar ceiling in a mad rigadon. The only sounds were explosive gaspings, stampings of feet, a wordless muttering from Aleki Aponi.

Tom discovered, as Tracy had on the other night at the Destin place, that Aponi did not have enough of a neck so that his arm could be hooked under the man's chin. The small head ducked, slipping the hold; Aponi writhed violently and Tom flew aside again, pinwheeling, slamming into a corner.

Tracy struggled up anew, now between Aponi and the cellar doors. As the big man came at him, in a hunched-over shuffle, he attacked frontally, leaning into Aponi, slugging the blows at his belly, just above the waistband of his denim pants. If the massive body held any point of vulnerability, he thought, it had to be there.

For a fleeting second he thought Aponi might be chopped down, for the man whimpered and gave ground, retreating.

"Tom, get out!" Tracy gasped. The way through the doors was clear.

There was no response. And Aponi, who had gained a little room, swung a ponderous roundhouse right at Tracy's head.

The light from the lantern was on him. Tracy saw the blow coming, tried to gauge it and slip the fist with a jerk of his head; Aponi would be left wide open with the swing of that arm, and all he had to do then was lift an uppercut to his chin. Again, though, his reflexes were slow. He got his head out of the way, but the fist clubbed him at the juncture of neck and shoulder, with paralyzing effect.

Tracy felt himself spilling down like an empty bag. He huddled on his knees, knowing this fight was over for him.

Aponi headed for the open again. Tracy turned his head with great effort and saw Tom hugging the floor a dozen feet away. He was making no move. For Tom Lopaka, the fight was over also.

## Fourteen

Then Tracy saw that for Tom the fight was not yet over. He was making one more effort, was suddenly working himself crablike across the floor and was with gritty effort lifting himself to his feet. He lurched toward Aponi. Somehow he managed an awkward run. Aponi, at the base of the steps, became aware of him and started to turn. Tom leaped at his back again.

Tracy shook his head. It hadn't worked before, he thought dully, and would not work now; once more Aponi would shake him off.

Then he saw that Tom was attacking in a different fashion. His legs were about Aponi's torso, locked, so he could not be shaken off. He was not attempting the stranglehold. Instead he was gripping the man's head with both hands, thumbs digging in under his ears.

Aponi thrashed violently. His eyes were all white in fear and pain by the light of the lantern. He stumbled about staggeringly, trying to do several things but in the wrong sequence—attempting first with his massive hands to break the grip of Tom's legs, failing in that, lifting them to flail backward frantically at Tom's face, and finally making the effort to end the murderous pressure of those gouging thumbs.

Tom Lopaka, features granitic, tenaciously hung on, riding the man piggy-back. Aponi screamed suddenly, a thin, fading sound.

Tracy watched, holding his breath, knowing what Tom was attempting, the squeezing of the carotid arteries which

supplied the brain with the blood and oxygen it must have. A normal man could withstand being deprived of them for seconds only. But those seconds passed and Aponi was still on his feet—and turning now, taking a struggling step, then another, toward the nearest wall. His intent was plain, to smash Tom Lopaka against the wall and shake him off.

In the middle of his third step Aleki Aponi's endurance ended. He fell as a tree falls, straight forward, slamming into the floor with violence. Tom managed to let go and throw himself aside in time to avoid having a leg pinned under the massive body.

Tracy lifted himself jerkily. He went and leaned down to Aponi, grunting with even this simple effort.

"I feel as if I had just jumped off the Pali," Tom muttered, getting slowly to his feet. "How is he?"

Testing a pulse, Tracy said, "Okay. I hope he'll stay asleep for a while. Let's have your shoelaces, Tom."

They worked fast, tying the big man up, his ankles first, then his wrists behind his back. They dragged him over against a wall and Tracy stuffed a handkerchief between his teeth, wondering if such effort would really accomplish anything, wondering whether Tom, like himself, was fighting the urge to forget about Aponi and bolt through the open doors.

Perhaps so. Tom hurriedly tested the knots, then said. "Now for God's sake let's get out of here!"

They started up the cellar steps. But still Tracy paused and turned back to pick up the lantern. "We'd better take this along or the house might burn down," he explained.

"At the moment I am of the opinion that it might be a damned good thing if it did," Tom Lopaka growled.

Emerging from the cellar was like awakening from a prolonged nightmare. Tracy filled his lungs with sweet, cool night air and felt a little better.

Tom said, "I don't hear a thing. Why hasn't somebody come to investigate? I would have sworn the racket we were making would have been audible at Waikiki."

"It's a big house," Tracy said. "The walls might have muffled the noise. Unless someone was here at the rear, maybe nobody heard it."

He paused a moment, and went on, "Tom, I have a feeling we may have missed something in the subcellar. Perhaps I ought to go back—"

"You're kidding!" Tom said incredulously.

But Tom Lopaka hesitated also, then added, "Oh, all right. But I'll toss you for it; the other one stays right here by these cellar doors, just in case."

Tracy considered. He shook his head, blew out the flame of the lantern and put it on the ground. "No. On second thought, we can wait until later. If anything is there it isn't likely to leave."

"I can almost hear the wheels going around inside of your head," Tom said. "Tracy, are you starting to get the answers?"

"Some of them, I think, but hazily. Things should begin to clear up when I find Yolanda."

"Can't that wait also?" Tom asked. "I'm for finding and neutralizing LaDew first."

"That's the job I'm handing you," Tracy said. "There is a .45 automatic in the Chrysler's trunk, wrapped in a piece of canvas. A couple of bullets are in the clip. I picked it up when we were involved in the forged pass racket at Wheeler Field some months back, meant to turn it in but forgot."

"That changes things!" Tom said with pleasure. "Okay, blalah, hiki-no . . . can do! You hold the fort while I tell Moke to bring Quon on like the Seventh Cavalry, then I'll pick up the .45 and start hunting Mr. LaDew."

"He's packing a big hate for both of us," Tracy warned. "Be carefull!"

"Sure." Tom Lopaka said. "I'll move quiet and keep both eyes peeled."

He faded silently into the darkness.

Tracy worked his way along the rear of the house. He found the kitchen door and let himself in.

Indefinable whispers seemed to rise and fall about him as he worked his way across the cavernous kitchen, with a scalp-tightening suggestion that they might be whispers from the past, a muttering of uneasy ghosts. Tracy shook this thought off. There could be ghosts enough around, he

thought, but what he was hearing was human voices, not very far away. He bumped into a swinging door and went through that into a corridor. He passed the bricked-over door which had formerly opened into the cellar.

The voices were growing louder. He came to another door, with a thin wedge of light showing under it, gripped a knob and turned that with care, easing the door open.

He was looking into the big front room at the front of the house, where the few bulbs in the chandelier were now burning. Cotter and Yolanda were facing each other near the stairs.

Cotter, hammering his cane against the floor, was speaking with harsh forcefulness, "—and I told you to stop Steele's prying, no matter what you had to do!"

"I tried," she protested. "I—I just couldn't seem to bring myself to it, while we were driving there. I thought there would be a chance when we were coming back. But then there was the shock of realizing I was seeing Milliamma, the fear she might know something and talk. I suppose she didn't, though. And afterward— But I don't want to think about what happened then!"

"How could Milliamma possibly know anything?" Cotter snapped. "As always, you behaved like a fool."

He leaned on his cane, scowling at her. Cotter wore a blue suit, with a trench coat draped over his shoulders. A number of bags and suitcases were arranged near the table he had been using.

Yolanda was attired in a suit also, with a wrap over her arm. She said, "Ralph, please, let's go!"

Cotter said, "I suppose I might be making too much of the possibility that Steele might show up again. A man is checking the grounds for me, and has not reported anything wrong. . . . Go? Presently. I must see to it first that those cellar doors are securely locked again. Also, there is something you must do. You know what it is."

She said, "Can't it—wait?"

"You have been saying that ever since New York," Cotter replied. "No, it cannot wait. The papers are ready, on the table. You will sign them."

"I won't," the woman said, but faintly.



"You will!" Cotter snapped. "I am not going to continue to risk losing everything as a result of your mad impulses!" He shifted position toward the table. "Do it! And after that—"

His voice died, as Tracy Steele came on around the sweep of the wide staircase.

Yolanda started at sight of him. Hope showed in her features, but for a second only, swiftly ebbing.

Cotter's pale eyes narrowed in hurried thought. He was obviously disconcerted, but shook this off.

"Good evening, Mr. Steele," he said. "So you appear again, as I rather anticipated you might."

Tracy became aware of his own appearance. His suit was ripped and torn. It was dirt-smeared. So, he presumed, was his face, which was beginning to ache where LaDew had pistol-whipped him.

"I had another look at the cellar here," Tracy said. "Did you also rather anticipate I might do that?"

"I regarded it as a possibility," Cotter slowly conceded.

"And I found what was under it," Tracy continued, with an inward apology to Tom Lopaka for not granting him credit for the actual find. But he did not intend to mention Tom. A mental clock was ticking in Tracy's head, measuring Tom's progress out to the highway and on to the Chrysler.

Cotter started. But then he laughed. "So you discovered the hiding place old Roger used when he engaged in the opium trade? I plan to speak of it in some detail in my book."

"You have known all along it was there? But you made no mention of it when we were searching today," Tracy said. "Why?"

Cotter shrugged. "I felt no particular compulsion to aid you. And the place holds no significance, as you must admit yourself. It has been closed up for a long while. There is nothing down there."

"Are you sure of that?" Tracy demanded.

"Of course!" Cotter snapped. But he hesitated, and continued, "Oh, there may be a trace or so remaining of the opium, though he did not engage in that trade for very

long. There were too many other opportunities for making money in large sums available to a man of ruthless purpose. The world has not changed so very much since then; such opportunities are still available to such a man—”

Tracy interrupted him, looking toward the woman. “Yolanda, did you know the subcellar was there?”

She made no reply. But the answer was in her features. She had known.

Cotter rapped his cane against the floor. “Enough of this! You have conducted another impudent invasion of privacy, and to no purpose, as before. Get out. Miss Destin and I have other matters demanding our attention.”

Tracy glanced to the bags arranged near the table. “You are planning to leave for the *Trident*?” he said.

It was Cotter’s turn to start. Then he shrugged again. “You have learned that I chartered the vessel? Perhaps there is a slight measure of ability in you after all. Yes, we will soon leave for the *Trident*.”

“No,” Tracy said.

The woman made some faint sound. A hand lifted slowly, jerkily. Fingertips touched her lips.

“Ah?” Cotter said gratingly. “And just what is going to stop us?”

“Murder,” Tracy Steele said. “Two murders, though the Honolulu authorities will be content to make an arrest on only one, the killing of Jack Burrell.”

It was suddenly very quiet in the big room, where shadows lay thick in all of the corners. The mingled odors of dust and decay seemed to grow stronger. Yolanda made another sound. Cotter glanced at her coldly, then returned attention to Tracy, who paced two steps closer to him.

He needed time, Tracy told himself, for Tom to reach the Chrysler and to return. Talk could do it, talk to keep these two here, listening. But this was not his sole reason for speaking of murder. There was fierce resolution in Tracy Steele to find some chink of weakness, to hammer hard at it, to force admission of what hard, concentrated thought had convinced him must be the truth.

“The first killing was the woman in Malaya,” Tracy continued. Then he shot a sudden glance at the woman who

was here, a sudden biting question, "Yolanda, why was she murdered?"

He had hoped to catch her off balance and perhaps almost did so, for the question seemed to strike her with the force of a blow. But Yolanda gasped, "She wasn't!"

Cotter smiled, a mirthless skinning of lips back from his teeth. "Of course she wasn't," he said. "And you are an inept fool after all, Steele, if you choose to make such an absurd statement in view of the plain findings of the Malayan police—"

"Those findings were unfortunately wrong," Tracy interrupted. "The woman was killed that night, undoubtedly by a savage blow to the head. Everything was favorable for concealment of the killing. It was late, the highway was nearby, with occasional traffic, and there was a record of previous sleep-walking. The woman's body was hauled out to the highway, to the sharp curve there. It was pitched under the night bus, rounding that curve. The mark of the blow to the head then appeared to be only part of the battering she had received in what was seemingly an accident."

Cotter laughed. "And who did all that?" he demanded. "I, perhaps, with my bad leg—?"

"You have demonstrated that your leg is not so bad at times, that you can get about without your cane," Tracy said.

He paused. The circumstances of murder in Malaya were admittedly all guesswork on his part—but true, he was convinced, in most of their details. He was not primarily concerned with proving those guesses correct though; if pressure could force one of these two here to crack, the proof would be forthcoming. Burrell's murder was the one of paramount importance. Tracy could marshal facts where that was concerned, and wanted now to get on to it.

He must, however, offer one more guess, something which had to be said. "Perhaps," Tracy said, "two people took part in what happened to the woman at Kuantan."

He was looking to Yolanda again as he spoke, and saw raw fear in her eyes for a fleeting instant. Then those dark eyes were veiled as she looked down at the floor.

"You came on to Honolulu," Tracy continued, before Cotter could speak. "Mae Gamble left you two. She had named her price for keeping silent about Kuantan and had been turned down.

"She quickly got a job in Hawaiian Eye's office. I think she meant to attempt to use our firm in some way as a lever against you. She must have changed her mind about that. Mae was afraid of you. She decided to make another move, in an effort to force a quick payoff. She called Jack Burrell, at San Diego, the man who had been in love with the woman who died."

Captain Elias Ziffren had said it, that Burrell had been stationed at San Francisco before going to San Diego. He had known the woman there, Tracy thought; Burrell must have known her.

Yolanda stirred. "Then there was a man in her life? Mae hinted as much to me—"

Cotter turned on her. "Shut up!" he snapped savagely. She shrank back from him.

"There was a man, yes," Tracy said. "Mae told him his sweetheart was dead, and that her death had not been an accident. It started him rushing toward Honolulu at once. Then Mae called you, Cotter, and warned that he was on his way. It was your last chance to pay her; she could let Burrell find no one when he arrived, or she could face him and tell him the truth. It was up to you."

"Dear God, what ridiculous nonsense!" Cotter said. "And I am weary of listening—"

"You discounted her threat," Tracy plunged inexorably on. "So you went to the airport and waited for the delayed landing. You saw Burrell arrive, as Mae had said he would. There is no nonsense about that. We have a photograph which places you there."

For the first time, the man seemed slightly shaken. He moistened his lips. Fine beads of sweat began to glisten on his forehead.

"You hurried ahead of him to Mae Gamble at the Hawaiian Eye office," Tracy continued, again giving him no time to speak. "As at Kuantan luck favored you, for you found her alone."

It had favored him even more than that, of course, since no one had yet been found who had observed that entrance.

"You talked to her," Tracy said. "You must have made a deal with Mae, at last. Then Burrell appeared. Yolanda told me she saw him waiting alone in our reception room. So you and Mae were then either at the patio or in our office. You sent Mae in to talk to Burrell, while you listened. But she did more than talk. She took him to where you were waiting."

Cotter shifted position, his shadow shifting with him, and all of the shadows in the big room seemed to move slightly.

"Why, Cotter?" Tracy demanded. "Why did you do it at that time and place, when both were so dangerous for you?"

The man did not reply. His head tilted slightly; he was listening for approaching footsteps, for LaDew to show up.

Tracy did not press for an answer. It could wait until later.

The deed had been done, and he thought again of his own surmise that the blow must have been struck from behind, that Burrell could not have known it came from Cotter or that Cotter was there. Even if Burrell had recovered he could not have pointed at Cotter, only at Mae Gamble.

Cotter had an overwhelming amount of ego, but he could never have sat here, Tracy thought, poring through Roger Destin's old papers, without the knowledge that he had nothing to fear from Burrell. If there had been any slight element of worry or doubt, the man's death had erased that.

Obviously Cotter felt that he had nothing to fear from Yolanda either, and Tracy studied her for a moment again. But he did not speak to Yolanda. The time for that was not yet.

"You shoved Burrell into the pool," Tracy said. "Then luck at last seemed to desert you. I came in from the street. You had to get away from there. But where could you go? There was no safe exit. A man with a cane might

be observed and remembered. You feared that possibility. It hadn't mattered when you had entered, but then you had not intended to deal with Burrell there. Now you had dealt with him. Now you were afraid to leave, to be seen."

Something more had been involved, Tracy thought; probably, arriving from the airport and walking in on Mae Gamble, he had paused to glance about, had seen an empty street, no one in sight noticing that entrance. No doubt he had remembered this, had told himself that if he could only get away unobserved there was scant chance he could ever be placed on the scene. All that had happened since must have buttressed that belief.

"You went into my apartment, Cotter, forcing Mae to go with you," Tracy continued. "She had no choice, though she knew the danger that my partner or I might appear and walk in at any moment. However, your luck was strong again. We did not enter. You saw Burrell carried away, saw those in the patio leave, with your chance of escape increasing as time ran on, but only if you could find some way to get out without being noticed. And you did find one."

Tom Lopaka was due back, overdue. Where was he? What was he doing?

"You put on coveralls and a hotel cap, found in my place," Tracy said. "You seized your chance; when our office was empty, you went out through the patio door, across the hotel lobby and down to the garage, outwardly a hotel employee winding up a day's work. The cane went with you, under the coveralls where it would not impede you from walking. And something else also went with you—a stepladder taken from my service porch, carried upright. You could touch that stepladder briefly to the floor every now and then. It served as your cane until you reached a place where you could discard those items—close to your car, in the garage, where a supper hour crowd hid you, unnoticed as you drove away."

It had happened, Tracy was convinced, in all of its essentials, exactly as he had stated. Every fact had checked out in his thinking.

And—had Mae Gamble driven away with him? But this was a question Tracy could not answer.

He stood silent. The old house seemed to hold its breath. Cotter said, "Are you finished?"

The man had regained his aplomb. He laughed contemptuously. "I could ruin you forever for saying such things in the presence of a witness! You are a witless fool to come here with such wild charges, without anything but a photograph you claim to have which could not be used to prove anything—"

"And without Mae Gamble?" Tracy said. "But perhaps she isn't needed now."

He began to move again, toward Yolanda. Tracy had no time to be gentle with her. "Tell what you know, Yolanda!" he demanded. "Tell it now!"

"But I don't know anything!" she cried.

Haunting terror in her eyes gave the lie to that statement.

"You do know," he said. "You're not going to shield Cotter any longer!"

"Shield him?" Yolanda cried bitterly, voice shrill and almost out of control. "Oh, God, you've got it all wrong—!"

It came to Tracy Steele suddenly that logic, seemingly presenting a picture of events that seemed true in all details, had played him false, for the picture had not been complete.

He had braced himself to accept a logical reason for Yolanda's silence, complicity in Ralph Cotter's actions, and he had been wrong, for a deadly possibility had been overlooked. With a sense of coldness Tracy began to visualize just what the possibility was, began to understand the true nature of the terror which clawed at this woman.

But he could not stop now. All of his talk, seemingly at Cotter, had actually been directed at her, a putting of pressure on her, building to this crucial moment when she must at last be forced to talk. And he found himself abruptly remembering the incident on the mountain road today, remembering what had led up to it—talk about Milliamia, but of someone else as well.

"Yolanda, why were the cellar doors locked and the door from the house to the cellar bricked over, when your

mother left this house?" he demanded. "Why was the subcellar trap door nailed shut? What is down there?"

Both Cotter and the woman reacted violently.

She cried, "I can't tell you; I can't!"

Cotter lunged toward Tracy, his cane starting to rise. He shouted, "Damn you, leave her alone!"

"Stay out of this!" Tracy snapped at him.

There was one more question to be asked with no delay—based on a wild hunch, perhaps, though he did not think so; again he was remembering the incidents on the mountain road. He hammered the question at her, "Yolanda, what happened to Manolo Fabregas?"

She shivered with a gasp of anguish.

Cotter shook the trench coat from his shoulders and dragged a gun from a jacket pocket. "Keep quiet! Don't say another word!" he shouted at the woman. Then he thrust the weapon at Tracy Steele. "This is the last time I'll tell you; Get out!"

Tracy glanced to him coldly. "It's a lot too late for that," he said. "She is going to answer.... Yolanda, where is Manolo? What happened to him?"

Her hands quivered in a gesture of hopeless despair. All of her defenses were gone, all of the brittle sophistication of her life had been swept away.

"Manolo is buried in the subcellar," Yolanda replied. "I killed him."



## Fifteen

The words seemed to whisper back and forth across the room in dusty echoes. They came as no surprise to Tracy Steele. Everything had coalesced in his thinking, indicating this as the ultimate answer, the reason for her fear and silence, a dread secret which had lain dormant here for a dozen years, now wrenched from her.

The report from Washington would not be needed. He had proved she was truly Yolanda Destin, but at a deadly price.

"It was the reason we had to go away," she said. "I killed him!"

Cotter leaned on his cane, gun still in his hand, still pointing at Tracy. His features were tight, lined. Anger glittered in his eyes. But he did not speak.

Tracy said, "Take it easy, Yolanda. And tell me about it."

"Manolo was beating my pony that afternoon. I saw it, and screamed at him to stop. He wouldn't. I grabbed up a chunk of wood and ran at him. I hit Manolo on the head. And he fell. He didn't move again. He just lay there—"

The words rushed from her. They had been dammed up in Yolanda for a long while. She was finding a catharsis of wretched relief in confession, Tracy thought.

He had a mental picture of it, the dark-featured groom falling, the girl—she would have been about twelve or thirteen then, for a guess—standing over him with the chunk of wood in her hand, hysterical terror seizing her

as she realized the enormity of what she had done.

Cotter still made no effort to silence her.

Yolanda had dropped the chunk of wood, had fled from the scene, rushing to her mother in this house. Tracy had a mental picture of that also, the woman who had been too soon bereft of her husband, still mourning him, listening in horror as the daughter of the man she had idolized told what had happened.

Cotter had gone to check. He had returned with the confirmation that Manolo was dead. Something must be done at once. Cotter was ready with suggestions. The mother of Yolanda Destin was ready to listen, to act as he directed.

"Mother and Ralph buried him in the subcellar," Yolanda said, her voice dry and strained but somewhat more steady. "It must have been dreadful, getting him down there. Mother wanted to put a cross over him. Ralph said no, they mustn't take a chance on there ever being any sign of a grave—"

But there had been a sign, the loose dirt scattered about which Tracy Steele had noticed.

"I was made to stay in my room," Yolanda said. "Mother came to me when it was over. She told me to kneel and pray for him. . . . Two days later, we left Honolulu and went to San Francisco."

Her voice sighed to silence. Cotter breathed hard.

Tracy was beginning to worry about Tom Lopaka. He said, "Who bricked over the door from the house into the cellar?"

"Ralph," she whispered in response.

So Tracy had guessed. "But your mother nailed the trap door shut?"

This seemed evident. Cotter, Tracy thought, would have made a better job of it.

"Yes," Yolanda admitted. "She did that just after they—buried him. Ralph told me about it later. Mother would never discuss anything that occurred that awful day. She wouldn't ever let me talk about it."

The hammer that had driven the nails had then no doubt been laid distractedly aside, as Tom Lopaka had sur-

mised. All of what had happened held a quality of hurried, clumsy improvisation.

But it had achieved its purpose. The trash barrels had been placed over the trap door, the outer cellar doors had been locked, the other servants had been paid off and dismissed, the house had been closed up and left to the keeping of McLarnin, with orders that he was to stay out of it. Then they had gone away, Mrs. Destin beginning her retreat from the world. And if these two here had not come back, the death of Manolo Fabregas might never have been known by anyone else.

Silence had settled again; this time Cotter broke it. "All done?" he inquired bitingly of Yolanda.

His cane thumped the floor. "You brainless, loose-mouthed fool!" Cotter continued. "God, what I have had to endure from stupid Destin women, first your mother and now you!"

Tracy said, "Cotter, it's plain now how you gained the power of attorney that you hold. With what you knew, Mrs. Destin could not deny you anything."

Cotter studied him coldly. "Why shouldn't I have taken over? The Destin money, piled up by strong, ruthless men—and Roger and his son were all of that—had reached the hands of these women. I had more right to it, was more of a Destin in spirit and feeling than either of them! Of course I seized the chance when it came!"

He glanced again, lip still curled, to Yolanda. Head bent, she stood as though exhausted, one who had lived with a terrifying sense of guilt through a long nightmare which still gripped her.

Had that guilt alone kept her silent since Tracy Steele had first met her? The answer to this, he thought, was not to be disclosed yet. For Cotter was studying him anew, and he felt that he could guess exactly what the man was thinking.

"Steele, you drove her to that confession," Cotter said. "You are going to wish that you had not done so."

"Threats, Cotter?" Tracy said. "Just what do you have in mind for me? A swing of your cane, as with Doris Varney and Jack Burrell? Or perhaps a bullet from that gun you

are holding, with another grave to be dug in the sub-cellar—?”

Cotter showed a thin smile. “Another grave? No. One visit to that place, one grave dug—with a whimpering woman for company—were enough for a lifetime!”

“You will be very stupid if you attempt anything at all,” Tracy said. “That I am here is no secret. The police know, my partners know—”

“You are wasting your time with such talk,” Cotter interrupted. “We shall leave presently, Yolanda and I, to board the *Trident* as previously planned. No one will hinder us, either then or later. There will be no disclosure of what has been said here.”

Yolanda still stood with head bowed. Tracy had a feeling she was not wholly aware of what was being said.

Cotter laughed. “Oddly enough, Steele, I am in your debt. I have been asking her to do something for me. She has been holding back. Now I think she will be quite amenable to my wishes as a result of what has happened tonight, of what is yet to happen—”

The door through which Tracy had entered the big room suddenly crashed open. Tom Lopaka appeared, stumbling forward, driven by a grinning George LaDew who was prodding him hard with a gun.

“Cotter, look at what I’ve got for you!” LaDew called exultantly.

There was fresh blood on Tom’s cheek, from another cut in his forehead. He sent a look to Tracy which said, “Partner, I’m sorry; I goofed!”

“Hey, I see you got the other one!” LaDew said. “I left them both stashed in that hole under the cellar—don’t know how the hell they managed to wiggle out.”

Cotter had shifted warily, keeping his gun on Tracy, to inspect Tom Lopaka. He shot a taut question at LaDew, “Are there any others prowling about?”

“Nah. No others. No cops at all, if that’s bothering you,” LaDew replied. “Looks like these two were tackling it on their own. My boy was trying to make it to a Chrysler parked up Nuuanu a piece. We played hide and seek for a while; he lost.”

"They have both lost," Cotter said thinly.

Tom Lopaka said, "Tracy, what's the score?"

"Manolo Fabregas is buried in the subcellar," Tracy said. "That was the pilikia that drove Mrs. Destin away. Manolo was killed. Yolanda has confessed to having done it."

Tom nodded slowly. "Anything else?" he asked.

"Cotter gets full credit for Doris Varney and Jack Burrell—motive obscure where the woman was concerned, but plain in Burrell's case. Admission of guilt? Not yet. But it can all be hung on him for a perfect fit, same M.O. in both cases, plenty of corroborative facts—"

He caught himself, considering the startling fact that there had been the same M.O. in not two murders, but three.

He had heard Yolanda's abject confession, though, that it was she who had struck Manolo down. However, another element of coincidence—that Cotter had so conveniently been handed the opportunity to get his hands on the Destin money by Manolo's death—had arisen to plague Tracy.

Cotter said, "LaDew, listen to me. Miss Destin and I are leaving this place tonight, leaving Honolulu. I want you to go with us. There will be money for you, a great deal of money."

LaDew grinned. "Man, you're singing the song I like best!"

"Georgie, you had better think twice," Tracy warned. "He's planning to leave the islands on a chartered boat. It will be over the side and the deep six for you if you buy his proposition."

"You scare hell out of me," LaDew jeered. "I can take care of myself!"

The door through which LaDew had shoved Tom Lopaka had remained open. Tracy, the only one facing toward it, saw something move there, with a brief shimmer of white, then for a second glimpsed a face before it vanished, the face of Cricket Blake.

Tom carefully shifted position just a little. A fist clenched against his thigh and a forefinger snapped momentarily

at Tracy Steele. Tom was saying that Tracy was to call the moment when they would make a try at freedom. The chances were chillingly high that going against a pair of guns would never succeed, but the attempt must be made, and very soon.

Tracy was in complete agreement—or had been until that glimpse of Cricket a moment ago. Had someone come with her, starting to close in after LaDew had prodded Tom into the house, help that would turn the tables on Cotter? He rejected this possibility. Quon, he knew, would never let her incur such danger as to enter this place.

Cotter said, "We're going out to the Chrysler. You'll drive, LaDew, heading up to the Pali. I'll follow in the Cadillac, to bring you back. These two will ride with you. Don't worry; they won't be bothersome."

"You're planning a variation of what happened at Kuantan?" Tracy said. "Our heads cracked first, and then the Chrysler to go over a drop-off at some curve?"

Cotter smiled frostily, acknowledging that Tracy had scored a bull's eye. The car crumpled at the bottom of a deep canyon, Tom Lopaka and Tracy Steele battered and still within it . . . who could say, as with Doris Varney, that it had not been a regrettable accident?

Cotter gestured toward the front door with his gun. "Start moving," he ordered.

"You'll never get away with it," Tracy warned.

He was fighting for a moment or so more of time, hoping for a desperately needed break. Cotter's unwinking eyes, his competent grip on the gun he held, threatened that trying to jump him could be fatal. His weapon was a Colt .32 automatic which fired a small but deadly slug.

Tracy was also feeling pressure to do something at once, whether a break came or not. He feared that if he did not move, Cricket might try something, impulsively, which would land her in the same menacing trap that now held himself and Tom.

"Get away with it?" Cotter said. "Who is to stop me? No one. And whom shall I fear afterward? LaDew? He likes money too well to talk. Besides, he will be fully involved then, which will also serve to keep his mouth shut. Yolanda?

She has had her moment of confession. It will not happen again. She will stay silent from this point on."

Yolanda stirred, head lifting. She had heard his final words, at least, for she said, "No, Ralph. I will not stay silent!"

The man sent an irritable scowl her way. "I have had enough of your foolishness for one night," he said. "Shut up!"

"I won't!" she cried. "I am going to tell the police about Manolo, as soon as I can!"

Cotter's lips compressed tightly. Rage showed as a baleful flickering in his eyes. He said, "Must I remind you again of what will surely happen to you if they ever learn what you did to Manolo—of him lying there in the carriage house with his head crushed?"

"I don't care what happens to me—!"

Her voice trailed off. She stared at him. "Head crushed? But it wasn't! I only hit him once. And—carriage house? It happened at the stable!"

An electric quivering suddenly seemed to charge the heavy air. Tracy saw Cotter's expression alter, for the first time saw the man caught off balance, at a loss for words.

"Manolo wasn't at the carriage house when I left him!" she cried. "How did he get there? He was too big; you couldn't have dragged him. He walked, by himself. And you found him. You, Ralph, with your cane! I didn't kill him. You did it—!"

Then she ran at the man, striking, clawing, a wild assault that was the culmination of a dozen years of domination, of pressure and threats. Heedless of herself, Yolanda attacked her tormentor.

LaDew looked toward them in astonishment. Cotter threw the woman aside with a fury which sent her reeling toward the stairs. She tripped and fell. It was the break for which Tracy had hoped. Before Cotter could recover he was driving in, snatching at Cotter's gun-wrist, to grip and shake it hard in an attempt to disarm him. In the same instant, Tom Lopaka whirled and leaped at LaDew.

Tom also snatched at a gun. Like Tracy, he had no

choice in his manner of attack; he had to disarm his opponent and do it quickly.

Cotter gave ground before Tracy's assault. He got his back against the stairwell and braced himself there. And Tracy discovered the man had bull-like strength in arms and shoulders, as compensation for his weak leg. Eyes bulging, teeth gritted, he met and matched Tracy's effort. He could not bring his gun to bear but Tracy could not shake it loose. They strained against each other, locked momentarily in a stalemate.

A stamping of feet came from LaDew and Tom Lopaka as they fought.

Tracy felt weakness in himself, from the brutal efforts already required of him this night. He feared for Tom, who had been forced to take even more. Tracy used both hands in a desperate effort to snatch Cotter's gun away. As he did so a wicked blow slashed against his neck, almost finishing him. He had forgotten the cane which Cotter still gripped. It had cut at him, as it had cut at Doris Varney and Jack Burrell.

Anger spurred Tracy Steele into a daring gamble. He let Cotter's gun go with a quick shifting of his hands; he seized a body grip and hurled him furiously aside. Cotter's leg could not sustain him. He screamed thinly, falling. The gun, jolted from his fist, skidded away across the floor.

Tom wheeled about as LaDew shook Tom Lopaka off and, with a sweep of his arm, dumped Tom hard on his back. Those two blows to the head, earlier, had taken their toll; Tom hadn't enough strength left to cope with him.

LaDew grinned wickedly, bringing his gun around, tilting its muzzle down toward Tom Lopaka. Tracy ran at the man. The weapon shifted hurriedly at him, and two shots blasted heavily. Both bullets missed. The heat of powder flame from the second licked Tracy's cheek as he slammed into LaDew, snatching at the gun, trying to get a leg behind his leg and to trip him. He could not do it.

Tom was struggling up again slowly. Tracy had a hazy



impression of that, of Cotter crawling across the floor toward his own gun. He fought to hang on, praying that Tom would make it, that the two of them together could handle LaDew before Cotter was armed again.

LaDew slugged with his free fist, a punishing blow and another, pain slicing hotly through hurt ribs. Tracy felt his knees buckling. He was sliding downward. LaDew laughed contemptuously and broke the grip on his wrist, leaping back. Tracy found himself on his knees.

The gun in LaDew's grip danced from Tracy to Tom and back. He said, "Come on, try it again—!"

Two snapping explosions, waspish and sharp, sounded from behind Tracy. LaDew shuddered, mouth gaping wide. He took a step forward, trying to aim past Tracy. A third shot sounded. LaDew fell heavily on his side. Tom went waveringly to bend and take his gun.

Tracy looked around. Yolanda was standing beside the stairs. She had Cotter's .32, held tightly in both hands to steady it. She let the small gun go and sank down to the floor, putting those hands to her face, shoulders shaking.

Near her Cotter huddled on the floor. Cricket was standing over him. She had Cotter's cane, gripped like a baseball bat—Cricket, in a white dress, probably the new one mentioned to Tracy, that was green-stained and torn.

"Don't you move, mister!" she cried. "Don't you even wiggle!"

Kim came through the open door at the rear and stopped, gulping hard, eyes like saucers.

A sudden furious battering sounded at the front door; it burst wide and Greg MacKenzie lunged in, to look about and cry out with disappointment. "You guys always have the luck!" he said. "A head wind held up my plane; I couldn't make it any sooner!"

Danny Quon came stalking in after him.

"The gang's all here," Tracy sighed. "And if nobody minds I think I'll sit down for just a moment. I feel a little worn."

George LaDew was not dead and not liable to be.

It had been, again, the activity of Cricket that had

brought him here, Quon reported. Kim had told her of seeing Tracy drive away, of the hard, set look on his face and his failure to respond to Kim's greeting. Cricket had gone to Moke, begging him to call Quon and send him to the Destin house; Moke had refused and Cricket had cried that she would go, then. Thinking about it, beginning to worry, Moke had opened the envelope left by Tracy and had called Quon, who had arrived at the office to read the note himself only moments after Greg MacKenzie appeared there from the airport.

"So we came here to take a look, found Kim's cab and spent a little time trying to locate that crazy pair," Quon said. "Those shots sounded and we headed toward this house on the run. But what have we got as a result of it all? Charges of assault with deadly weapons, maybe—plus one more murder!"

"Which Cotter committed also," Tracy said. He was standing again. "The same M.O., plus a strong motive, control of the Destin money. Danny, you've heard Yolanda's story. She struck Manolo down at the stable. Cotter made a slip, revealing he died at the carriage house. She didn't kill Manolo; he did."

Quon glanced toward Cotter, sitting with head bowed at his table. Cotter had refused to say a word. "It's her statement against his," the lieutenant pointed out. "And I don't think that guy is likely to crack, confess—I"

The phone suddenly rang. Cotter started violently, sending a harried look toward it.

Tracy noticed that. He said, "Danny, let it ring!"

Tom Lopaka was also watching Cotter. "I think I know who it is too," he said. "She had to keep in touch with him. That must have been done by a phone call from her each night at the same time, as now. Cotter would have told her tonight that he was leaving the islands, and where and when she was to go aboard the *Trident*."

"At Kailua Bay, for a bet," Tracy said. "I imagine he meant to leave the Cadillac some place for her to use in getting there, sometime before dawn tomorrow. Five will get you ten, Danny, that Mae Gamble is on the other end of the wire."

"Where?" Quon demanded. "Tell me!"

"Probably in a phone booth somewhere on the beach," Tracy said. "But, with no answer, she will have to go back into hiding—"

A few final bits and pieces were falling into place. He began to pace, snapping his fingers. The phone fell silent.

"This confounded house booby-trapped us," Tracy muttered. "Thirty rooms, plenty of places to hide; it seemed certain she must be here. But she wasn't. Cotter picked an even bigger house for her, one with seven hundred and fifty rooms! You hit it on the head, Tom, when you said we might almost be able to reach out and touch her."

"And we were all as blind as bats!" Tom exclaimed, instantly comprehending.

Quon said, "If you guys will stop your double-talk—!"

"Let's finish up here, Danny," Tracy said. "Then we'll go and call on Mae. There is no hurry. In fact we'll probably have to wait."

He was right. Past one in the morning, at the lanai suite on the third floor of the Hawaiian Village Hotel, Quon began to grumble. "I think this is one time it adds up wrong."

"No. It adds up right," Tracy said. "One tip-off was that the girl at the lobby newsstand said Mae was heading into the lobby when last seen. I reached a tentative conclusion that that meant she was going on toward the garage to join Cotter, but I was wrong; she came upstairs, to this place. Another tip-off was that Yolanda told me Cotter had the key, wouldn't let her use the suite and wasn't using it himself, even though paying for it."

"But look around you," Quon protested. "There isn't a sign that anybody has been staying here."

"Danny, she has taken good care not to leave any signs of that," Tracy told him. "A suite not in use is checked only occasionally. Mae could slip out onto the lanai balconies if that happened. She probably slipped out of the hotel also, late at night by the service stairs, for food and to check with Cotter, as she tried to do tonight. Be patient. She will be along. She has nowhere else to go."

At one-twenty a key rattled in the suite's corridor door.

A woman, wearing dark glasses, hair dyed black since they had last seen her, appeared, screamed and tried to run away.

Quon caught her. "It's all over, Miss Gamble," he growled. "You're going to talk now. How you're going to talk!"

There were lines of strain in her face, and her eyes were puffy, red-veined. She had not been sleeping well, perhaps haunted by dreams of all she knew. Watching her as she wept, Quon said, "She'll wrap it up for us. The Navy owes you guys something. So do I."

Tracy wondered if there would ever be a complete wrap-up. One question was still bothering him, and he had a feeling only one person could supply the answer.

Just before Cotter had been taken away from the Destin house, Tracy had said, "Why did you kill Doris Varney?"

Cotter had sent him a brief look in return, a look in which, startlingly, agony as raw as an open wound had been revealed. But he had refused to reply.

## Sixteen

Tracy Steele and Yolanda Destin walked slowly together along the beach on the following night. Stars blazed in a black sky, torches danced on the water, and a soft breeze was blowing.

"Tracy, I lied to you about Jack Burrell," Yolanda said. "Not that I ever saw him, other than the one time in your reception room. It seems evident Ralph must have seen the man before, though—"

This was on the record now. Cotter had seen Burrell once, in Doris Varney's company in San Francisco, though Burrell had not seen him. Cotter had recognized the man on sight at the Honolulu airport.

"The lie I told was that I didn't know what had happened to him," Yolanda continued. "I did read that in the papers and immediately suspected Ralph, but I was too afraid to say so."

Manolo Fabregas had been always in her thoughts, with the fear Cotter would betray her if she did not keep silent about everything.

Yolanda said, "I really was trying to find Mae, that day at your office, in the hope she would tell me all she knew, the hope that I would then have something to use as a defense against Ralph. I was thinking of myself, not of justice for Doris. It is something that has to be admitted—with shame."

"I don't think anybody will hold that against you after what you did last night," Tracy said.

"One thing I didn't know was that Mae was working

for you," Yolanda went on. "While staying at the hotel I heard someone mention Hawaiian Eye. I thought of asking you to help me."

So there had been one small coincidence in the case after all, that Yolanda had come to them, not knowing where Mae was.

Tracy felt moderately tired. He had had little sleep during the past twenty-four hours, and the after-effects of last night's brawling still lingered. His side was taped up, support for two cracked ribs.

Yolanda continued, "I didn't want to go on the trip, particularly since I knew it would include Honolulu and I dreaded seeing this place again. But there was pressure from Ralph. I couldn't refuse; I had to go. He was determined that I would do as he wished before the trip was over."

Tracy knew why Cotter had been pressuring her, what the man had demanded from Yolanda. But he listened to her explanation.

She said, "Ralph had fallen for Doris, very hard."

This was the ironical key to the entire situation, that Cotter, the cold, calculating man who fancied himself the spiritual descendant of Roger Destin, had fallen in love with the woman he had hired as research assistant.

"I suppose that was what put the idea in his head, that he wanted her and hoped that as a man with wealth of his own, he could surely win her," Yolanda went on. "I felt a sense of guilty relief when Doris died, thinking he would leave me alone after that. Instead, he became even more insistent. Perhaps he thought there would be another Doris for him somewhere. The papers were on his table last night. He meant to make me sign them. If you hadn't appeared I would have. . . . He wanted me to give him half of the Destin money."

This had been the ruthlessly purposeful scheme of Ralph Cotter. He had controlled the estate's considerable income, but had wanted more, had wanted half of the estate for himself.

"He told me I was a throwback to my great-grandmother, who was also named Yolanda." The woman sighed.

"He said her madness was in me, that I would eventually do away with myself, as she did, and he meant to have something for himself before that happened."

Doris Varney had undoubtedly figured in Cotter's thinking, but the plan to raid the estate had probably been hatched before her appearance, Tracy thought. He remembered the report from Fred Kawano, the banker, to Tom Lopaka, that the Destin money had been left in trust for Yolanda. With Mrs. Destin dead, Cotter must have begun to move at once against the daughter. It seemed likely he would eventually have robbed her of everything if she had once given in to him.

"You're not a throwback to anyone," Tracy said. "There is no need to think about that any more or ever to be afraid again. You're free now. It is all over."

"Free!" she breathed. "And all over. I find that hard to believe—especially that I didn't kill Manolo—"

Tracy thought of this, as they walked along the beach, thought of all that had transpired this long day.

Mae Gamble, with realization that only a full confession of all she knew could save her, had talked freely. Parts of her statement had then been read to Cotter.

He had listened, head bowed, in his cell. Quon had said, "It's time for you to talk. How about it?"

Cotter had refused to speak.

A night in jail had worked a shocking change in him. His eyes were sunken, his features waxy, and deep, haggard lines showed in his face. Tracy sensed a curious sickness of the spirit in the man, which had struck with devastating effect. What had caused it? He wondered, as Quon went on, "Mae Gamble's testimony gives us an airtight case against you where Burrell is concerned. And you can save everybody, including Miss Destin, a lot of trouble if you'll clear up what happened to Manolo Fabregas."

The remains in the subcellar had been exhumed, but not a great deal had been learned. Yolanda was technically in arrest on suspicion of Manolo's murder.

Cotter still remained mute.

They had Yolanda's statement. Under intensive questioning she had managed to remember a good deal about

that day. Tracy told Cotter this, "Milliama was away from the house. Yolanda thinks she was visiting relatives. There was a maid of all work who lived out; she had left for the day. Maddern, the chauffeur, had driven the cook to do her marketing, as was the custom each afternoon. So only you, Mrs. Destin and Yolanda were at the house when she rushed in, weeping wildly, crying that she had killed Manolo. You offered to go and investigate. It must have been in your mind instantly that you were being handed the chance of a lifetime—"

He need no longer be the poor, limping relative, living on what was granted him by his mother's sister. Manolo dead by Yolanda's act could put control of the income from the Destin estate in his hands. So his thinking must have gone. Everything favored him if he moved fast. There were no witnesses. The disappearance of Manolo, a sullen, unliked nobody, would not concern anyone, especially if the other servants were immediately paid off and sent away.

"Then," Tracy said, "approaching the stable, you saw the man either at the carriage house where he had his room, or heading toward it. The blow struck by Yolanda had only stunned him.

"You went after him, Cotter," Tracy said. "That such a lout should still be alive, that your chance should vanish, was unbearable. In the carriage house, you struck with your cane, and he went down. Then you struck again—and again—to make sure. His skull shows he took at least three hard blows.

"You then returned to Mrs. Destin, to report Manolo dead and Yolanda's story true. You forced the decisions you wanted—to bury the body, to close up the house to hide that act, to leave the islands. In San Francisco, you told her you were taking charge of the estate. The body in the grave meant she could not oppose you. You made Yolanda come back to that house, stay under its roof, to remind her it was there. You meant still to leave Manolo where he was, to continue to use him as a club against her."

"Admit it is all true!" Quon demanded.

But Cotter would not admit anything, not a confirmation



of what had happened to Manolo, or, as Quon continued to prod, of the happenings at Kuantan, related by Mae Gamble.

Why had he killed Doris Varney?

Mae Gamble had not been able to tell them.

That night at Kuantan, she had turned in and was dozing. Doris Varney was reading what seemed to be an old book. When the other woman suddenly went out of the bungalow, a robe over her nightdress, Mae had roused and followed her.

Mae knew Cotter was in love with the woman. Doris had confided that she had told the man she could not love him because of Jack Burrell. Still, Cotter had control of big money and a chance to own a great deal of his own; Mae knew something about that, about the pressure on Yolanda Destin to give it to him, though just what the nature of that pressure was mystified her. Mae was cynically wondering whether Doris was succumbing to the temptation of wealth. Perhaps, she thought, a peek would tell her.

What she saw occurred with startling suddenness, a somewhat distant glimpse through a window into Cotter's bungalow, only the heads and shoulders of the two visible, but Cotter's act clear and unmistakable as he struck her down with his cane.

"Doris couldn't have been in his bungalow more than half a minute," Mae had related. "I don't think she could have had time to say anything. She just walked in—and he hit her."

Mae also had seen what happened next, quite soon. Cotter had brought the body out.

"He had taken her robe off," Mae had said. "I knew right away he meant to make it seem she had been hurt while sleep-walking. He went toward the highway, sort of half carrying, half dragging her. It was an awful job for him, took quite a while, but he is very strong in his arms and shoulders, and he made it."

She had cautiously followed, had seen the rest of the ugly business—a low bank beside the sharp curve at the bottom of the highway slope, Cotter waiting there, then

pitching the body down at the first vehicle to come along, the night bus to Kuala Lumpur.

Mae had hurried back to her bed, pretending to be asleep when the police came along, with the exciting knowledge that her future could be all ease and luxury providing she played her cards right.

She had waited until arrival in Honolulu. On American soil again, she had revealed to Cotter what she knew, demanding twenty-five thousand dollars as first payment, with more to follow.

Tracy had questioned her at that point: Had she planned to use Hawaiian Eye in her effort at extortion?

"Sure," Mae had admitted. "Then I found out you were probably too damned honest to get mixed up in it. I couldn't waste time finding out for sure; the way Cotter reacted when I put the bite on him, with nobody around but that rumdum, LaDew, in case he came at me, I had to try something else, quick."

She had twice seen letters mailed by Doris Varney to Jack Burrell, and remembered his address. She had called him.

For Burrell, badly worried by the abrupt stoppage of Doris Varney's letters, the news of her death had been a hideous shock. At Mae's hint it had not been an accident he had said he would come at once. Mae then called Cotter, telling what she had done.

Burrell's arrival at the airport had been witnessed by Cotter, proof she was not bluffing. He had hurried to find Mae. Her Hawaiian Eye job had worried him; he had been afraid to risk contacting her by telephone. He had found Mae alone but had insisted on looking around to make certain of that. They were together at the patio, Cotter stating Burrell must not find her, that he was now willing to pay, when Burrell appeared at the reception room. His taxi driver, offered a double fare, had brought him more quickly than expected.

"We tried to get out through the patio door to the lobby, but the latch stuck," Mae Gamble had stated. "I told him to keep working on it and I would try to get rid of Burrell.

Somebody else came in from the street"—Yolanda Destin—"but left. Then I started through the office. The reception-room door was open and he saw me coming. He met me in the office."

He knew her, had seen Mae once in Doris's company in San Francisco.

"I started to talk fast, about how he must have misunderstood me over the phone, that I had said *maybe* Doris's death had not been an accident but had now decided I was wrong. He said, 'Stop it!' Then he said, 'Somebody has got to you. Who was it?'

"The look on his face scared me. I started backing up, out onto the patio. He came after me. We were close to the pool when he grabbed me and started shaking hard, yelling that I was going to tell him everything, and if I got hurt he didn't care. I saw Cotter behind him, and I broke loose from his hold on me—"

Cotter had struck hard. Burrell had gone headlong into the pool.

Both of them had thought him dead. Cotter had put the koa-wood club beside the pool, an effort to lead the police astray. Then Tracy's arrival, with Cricket, had forced them into the apartment.

They had waited out the afternoon, Cotter afraid to attempt to get away along the beach unless forced to do so. He had sought a way to leave undetected and had found it. Meanwhile—hating the woman, no doubt, but counting the risk too great to attempt to do anything about that at the time—he had told her they had nothing to fear if she dropped from sight.

Mae, chain-smoking, badly frightened but dazzled anew by the lure of big money, had agreed to hide out in the lanai suite. It would be for a couple of days only, Cotter had told her, then he would find a foolproof way for them to leave the islands; he felt it might be dangerous to attempt that sooner. Mae knew he meant to kill her then, but she was trying to find a way to outsmart him.

As Tracy had surmised, Cotter had looked about upon entering the Hawaiian Eye office, had seen no one at all

in sight. Preparing to leave, at dusk, he had felt certain that he would get away with it.

The patio door had opened for them, on their second attempt.

Tracy discovered, from Mae, that Cotter's car had not been in the hotel garage, but parked just beyond it on the street. Otherwise, his reconstruction of the man's escape, his use of the coveralls, cap and stepladder, had been correct.

So Mae Gamble's story ended, and Quon commented, "That does it! We've got him cold for Burrell's murder."

"Yes," Tracy had agreed. "But why did he kill Doris Varney?"

The question was still unanswered as he and Quon faced Cotter in his cell.

Why, after a dozen years of affluence and power, had he resorted to murder again? And why had it happened with such suddenness?

Tracy sought a way to make him talk. He abruptly realized there might be a very potent one. He said, "What about the biography of Roger Destin—?"

Cotter started. Tracy continued, "You might work on it here. I think it could be arranged."

"Sure. It *might* be," Quon quickly agreed.

The man moistened his lips. "That would be appreciated. But"—studying them both—"you want something in return?"

"You know what we want," Tracy said.

"No!" the man cried.

However, he shivered. They waited.

"The book is all I have left," Cotter muttered. "It must be finished! Please?"

"Talk!" Quon said.

And Cotter capitulated. "All right. About Doris—"

Quon snorted. He did not want to hear about Doris. Tracy gestured for the lieutenant to be quiet. Perhaps once he started talking, he would continue.

On the night in Kuantan, Cotter said bleakly, Doris Varney had pored late over an old ship's log he had ac-

quired that afternoon; she had suddenly hurried over to the bungalow with it. "There was something in the log she wanted to show me at once, I suppose," he muttered. "She had gotten very interested in the biography. The door was a little ajar. Maybe she knocked, but if so I didn't hear it. She came rushing in—"

Preparing to retire, taken wholly by surprise, he was in shorts and undershirt. Doris had stared at him. She had started to laugh.

Cotter bitterly rapped his left leg with his fist. "She saw this for the first time," he said.

His shriveled, broomstick leg, so greatly hated, so incongruous and grotesque, and her laughter peeling out in startled reaction, searing to the depths of his soul, unbearable to the man who had fallen in love with her but who had been told she did not love him in return.

In a red haze of uncontrollable fury Cotter had slashed with his cane to silence her—had slashed too hard, then had leaned on the cane, shivering, for he could hear her laughing still.

"I made her stop though," Cotter said. "I told myself to put it all out of my mind, good riddance . . . I managed to do that, pretty well. But now I hear her laughing at me again; it's like fire in my brain; all I can hear is her laughing!" He put shaking hands to his face. "And I see Burrell again—Manolo, when I hit him—"

The ends of justice, Tracy thought, were served in strange ways; Yolanda at last had been released from her purgatory.

Tracy and Yolanda left the night-shrouded beach and walked into the Hawaiian Eye reception room.

It was deserted. But sounds of music, of laughter and talk came from the patio. A quiet party was beginning there, under the golden luau torches. A white-coated waiter from the Ale Ale Kai Room was presiding over a buffet table. Danny Quon and Captain Elias Ziffren were standing together. Kim was strumming his ukulele. Greg MacKenzie, festooned with the welcome home leis he had demanded, was dancing with Irene Ling.

Cricket was with an admiring young Naval officer, Ziffren's aide. Tom Lopaka was in the pool, accompanied by the girl from the Royal Hawaiian whom he had been dating lately.

It was a party marking the end of tension, the closing of the book on what had happened, with new paths beginning for all of them. As Tracy stopped with Yolanda beside the reception desk, he had a sense of having arrived at a fork in the road that was his own life, of a necessity to choose which way he would go also.

Yolanda said, "I made my apology to Marty Fong this afternoon, and feel so much better because I did. Tracy, nothing like that bad temper, that wicked behavior, will ever happen again."

"I'm sure it won't," he said.

"And no more wild driving, no more sleeping pills to keep bad dreams away, no more moments of thinking that going on just isn't worth the effort," she said.

Moke glanced in at them, smiled, and returned to the party.

"I won't even let the memory of all the sad, lost years get me down," she continued. "The years when there was a barrier between my mother and me, when she would not speak of what had happened, would not let me speak of it. If only we could have talked!"

"It's all past, Yolanda. You must forget it."

"I will," she agreed. "I am going to sell the house at once. I will do all I can for Ralph, the best lawyers available, though I don't want ever to see him again. I am going to see Milliam, though, and do anything I can for her."

"Aleki Aponi could stand some help also," Tracy suggested.

Yolanda smiled. "Poor Aleki! Yes, I will see to it that a place is found for him where he will be happy."

She studied Tracy Steele then. "I owe so much to all of you here. What can I do for Hawaiian Eye—?"

He smiled. "A bill will be submitted."

"Fifty dollars a day and expenses? Let me do more than that!"

He shook his head.

Silence began now, stretching out. The sounds of the party seemed muted, far away. Studying her, Tracy realized he was viewing a near-perfection of loveliness, with a new quality of growing self-assurance now added to beauty.

Dark eyes intent on him, she breathed, "Tracy, what about—us?"

Silence claimed them again.

He was remembering the night in the hotel gardens. Love could happen, Tracy had thought then—but it had not happened for him.

There was a strong measure of attraction between them, of deep liking. Could this take the place of love? He wondered briefly, before knowing there could be only one answer.

The realization of his decision was in Yolanda. Her lips began to curve in a wry smile. "I tried to tell you good-by last night," she murmured. "I think this is exactly the right time and place to do it again, for the last time."

She came to him. He took her in his arms. Their lips merged, but gently. Then she was stepping back, turning away and walking briskly out. Thus, that quickly, it was all over.

Tracy Steele looked after her, with a moment of ruefully thinking that he might have been very quixotic. Beauty and wealth together—how often in a lifetime did a man have them offered to him in the person of an overwhelmingly desirable woman? Had he been a fool to balance love against all else and let Yolanda Destin walk away?

Someone breathed unsteadily nearby. He glanced around and saw Cricket, standing in the office doorway.

How long had she been standing there? Long enough, it seemed, for Cricket suddenly rushed to put her arms about him. She clung, quivering, with a shaken whisper, "Tracy, I was so afraid of what you might say to her!"

It came to him, without any surprise in the discovery, that Cricket had had a great deal to do with the decision he had reached a moment ago.

Tracy remembered the risk she had taken last night. He curled a forefinger under her chin and tilted her head up. "Lover, how could I ever think of leaving you?" he said.

He kissed her thoroughly.

After a bit, wholly Cricket again, she gasped, "Golly, I've really got something to remember now!"

Tom Lopaka and Greg MacKenzie had appeared in the office doorway, Tom rugged, bronzed skin glistening, Greg with the leis about his neck, both sharing a gravity which quickly waned at what they saw. They smiled in unison.

"Welcome back, partner!" Tom Lopaka said.

They had feared also they were going to lose him; Tracy found warmth in the relief they displayed.

His decision had been right. He would never regret having let Yolanda Destin walk away.

And the future—? He looked to Cricket, wondering about that. But waiting to find out would be easy, doing the things he liked most, in the best of company, here in the happy isles.

He put his arm about Cricket's waist. "That sounds like a good party you have going," Tracy Steele said. "What do you say we all join it?"



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